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ONE OF THEM

OTHER WORKS BY GILBERT FRANKAU

PEACE

ONE OF US (*7th Impression*)
(A Novel in Verse)

TID' APA (*3rd Impression*)
(A Poem)

THE WOMAN OF THE HORIZON (*4th Impression*)
(A Romance of 1913)

WAR

THE CITY OF FEAR (*4th Impression*)
(With which is incorporated "The Guns")

THE JUDGEMENT OF VALHALLA (*2nd Impression*)

IN PREPARATION

PETER JACKSON, Cigar Merchant

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ONE OF THEM

A NOVELETTE IN VERSE

BY GILBERT FRANKAU

LONDON
HUTCHINSON AND CO.
PATERNOSTER ROW
1918

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TO

EDWARD HUSKINSON, ESQ.

EDITOR OF "THE TATLER"

MY DEAR HUSKINSON,

Seven years ago a certain publisher, more famous for his tuft-hunting tendencies than his liberality—he was, by the way, the fifteenth of his breed whom I had approached in vain—informed me, àpropos of *One of Us*, that there was "no public for verse"; and greeted my suggestion that there was "no verse for the public" with that superior smile which cocksure senility reserves for innovating youth.

Your keenness to serialize *One of Them* in so popular a periodical as *The Tatler* having set the final seal of accuracy on my original contention, it seems only fitting that this masterpiece, now appearing for the first time in book form, should be dedicated to you.

Accept it therefore as some slight tribute to your editorial discrimination; and if you do not possess the patience to re-read that which you so carefully scrutinised in proof (ill-health has prevented all but the mildest revision of the original octets), at any rate have the pages cut before you set the volume in its place of honour on your drawing-room table.

Yours in friendship,
GILBERT FRANKAU.

THE BARN,
September, 1918.

I

Wherein the bard—released from War's confusions—
Preludes with egotistical allusions.

I

Six years ago—or is it six-and-twenty ?
(How vast the gulf from those ecstatic days !)—
When the whole earth snored on in slothful plenty
(Tho' poets cashed small pittance for their lays) ;
When war appeared less real than G. A. Henty,
And Oxo's snaky signs were yet ablaze ;
When all seemed peaceful as the press of Cadbury,
And no one dreamed of bombs, or bet a Bradbury ;

Or e'er stern Mars had roped us in his tether,
Ere Headlam lost his cannons at Le Cateau :
We fitted out—my Muse and I together—
And launched adown the galley-slips of Chatto
A barque of verse, full-rigged for halcyon weather,
Which many a critic judged to take the *gâteau.*
(Though some there were, high pundits of disparity,
Who wept at our unscholarly vulgarity).

We have sailed far since then; crossed our horizon;
Published our loves and travels in a novel
(A tale, men say, that Peckham's flapper cries on,
So that both Boots' and Smith's before us grovel);
And eaten ration bully-beef—with flies on;
And sheltered gratefully in many a hovel,
What time we sang of guns and gore and trenches,
Instead of oysters, tango-teas and wenches.

For times have changed since we wrote "One of Us":
Et nos mutamus—more or less—*in illis.*
Muse finds herself *in urbe* somewhat *rus;*
And I—if I disport with Amaryllis—
Where once my motor flashed, prefer a 'bus;
And shuddering note how vast the dinner-bill is;
And signing, sigh in secret for the calm,
Chaste, cheap seclusion of my Chiltern farm.

Yes, Muse and I are tired, and super-serious:
Her damask cheek is lined a bit, and wrinkled.
We are grown old, and London's late nights weary us:
While the gold wine that erst in ice-pail tinkled,
Her doctor finds extremely deleterious;
And mine forbids me red lips, passion-crinkled:
So now we cultivate domestic habits
Amongst our pigs, our poultry, and our rabbits.

Yet sometimes, as we trench our stubborn soil,
Or feed our sows, or strow the peat-moss litter,
Or set the morrow's chicken-mash to boil,
Or wander out where our young turkeys twitter,
Or read by mellow candle-light—since oil
Is dear and scarce; or talk—a little bitter
Because we find that Food Control Committees
Are all composed of men brought up in cities;

Sometimes, in this five-acre paradise
Whither my nerve-racked spirit fled the battle
(Deferring to friend Horder's sound advice—
A silver badge its only martial chattel),
I hear a voice, loud as the market price
That butchers bid for Rhondda's missing cattle,
Voice of my Muse, still vibrant with old passion,
Telling how poetry is now the fashion.

"Look you," she cries, "the Wheels are turning, turning.
Though Pegasus long since wore out his pinions,
Somehow his shod hooves keep the bread-mills churning.
Shrill, night and day, sing Marsh's Georgian minions:
Each sinking sun sets some new Noyes a-yearning,
Each rising moon reveals fresh hordes of Binyons;
Who batten fat on unsuspecting editors,
And—unlike you—contrive to pay their creditors.

"Poet, forsooth! You agricultural brute!
Have you no soul above the weight of porkers?
Was it for this I hearkened to your suit,
Gave you my metres and my rhymes—some, corkers?
Up, Gilbert! rummage out your rusty lute:
Polish it blacker than your black Minorcas:
And let its notes once more, in refluent stanzas,
Dower the Income-tax with glad Bonanzas."

So she; and—since I loathe to disappoint
The least illusion of the equal sex—
Let Byron's oil once more these locks anoint,
Once more let honour meet these Cox-drawn cheques . . .
Though well I know that times are spare of joint,
And satire's song less like to please than vex;
Now small beer, Smallwood, raids and strikes and rations,
Have near eclipsed the gaiety of nations:

Still, let me sing. Yet not as once I sung:
Love, fear, and death have chastened, sobered, saddened,
One who knew life's full burden-time too young;
Whom never youth's unhampered freedom gladdened,
But only envy and ambition stung,
And fickle passions—in love's semblance—maddened;
So that he needs must tumble now, poor clown,
On this Pindaric stage for half-a-crown:

Yet one who, 'spite a past that shocked St. Tony
And paid recording angels overtime,
Still holds his own at sonnet or *canzone*,
As some shall know who follow this my rhyme—
Some few: for gladly would I lay a pony,
Or larger sum, against a ten-cent dime,
That most of those who read this metred tract'll
Not know a spondee from a pterodactyl.

II

Explains—a task few modern penmen shirk—
The sociology of this great work.

II

God bless Democracy, George Bernard Shaw,
And William Dunn, our sanest, saintliest hatter!
God bless that great anomaly, the Law;
Aye may our knights on hoarded tea wax fatter!
God bless Sir Arthur Yapp's unfailing jaw,
Lord Lansdowne's pen, and brave Horatio's chatter!
And—lest in England Bolos quite prevail—
God bless King Northcliffe and his "Daily Mail"!

Long live the old Press—"Times," "D. T.,"
"Spectator"!
Long live the New—"Age," "Europe,"
"Statesman," "Witness"!
Long live each *acti temporis laudator!*
Long live Lloyd George in unmolested Pittness!
Long live "The Nation," facile demonstrator
Of everybody's—save its own—unfitness!
Long live Valera, Carson, Devlin, Plunkett!
Long live the lads who fight, the cads who funk it!

Long live our German banks, *sub duce* Plender!
Long may our railways rule our bounding sea!
Long may impatient Cuthberts paw their fender,
What time their patient Phyllis pours their tea!
Long life to each investor and each spender!
Long live the Staff! Long live the A.S.E.!
So long as England's in the melting-pot,
A prudent bard must sing, "Long live the lot!"

For who shall say—at close of Armageddon,
When the world's finished beggaring its neighbour,
When the last shell's been fired, the last pig fed on—
If we'll be ruled by Capital or Labour:
If a Welsh harp shall twang part-songs of Seddon,
While Simon pipes a compromising tabor:
Or whether every stalwart War-Loan-lender's son
Will find his Empire dividends signed "Henderson"?

Not I: not all the better men who fought
While dilutees preserved their precious skin:
Not those great early dead, whose single thought
Ran—"England: Germany: we've got to *win*."
Poor simple souls, of H. G. Wells untaught,
They never realized their next-of-kin
Would read how they had died to make life cheerier
For the dear blacks in Britlingized Nigeria.

Public, forgive your fool, if now and then—
Black bubbles on the verse's stream—appear
Thoughts of our worn, unlettered fighting-men;
If sometimes, through the grease-paint's gay veneer,
Truth shews—a wrinkled hag. The traitor pen
Forgets how blood is cheap and paper dear:
And I'm no more the blithe, nut-loving squirrel
Who frisked in the pro-consulship of Birrell.

Which is, perchance, the reason why my mind
Turns oft to those dear days, now dead as mutton,
When Haldane's soul with Bethmann-Hollweg dined;
And no one ploughed up golf-greens, sown by Sutton,
To bed the humble tuber's sprouting rind;
Or dashed off shorthand *billets-doux* in Dutton,
Or changed a blear-eyed pauper to a swell man
In six short weeks of Grub-Street-lauded Pelman:

Why now—sad minstrel in un-Sandoned sack-cloth—
I sing the twilight of the times I knew.
No more our glaring footlights blurr a back-cloth
Woven of misery and hung askew;
For Time, stern judge of Us, has donned his black cloth,
And to the Mob delivered up the Few . . .
Unless, of course, the Mob's but swapped its Peers
For a worse dynasty—of profiteers.

God knows, *we* had our faults—greed, blindness, pride.
God also knows we had a dashed good time.
Were they the worse for that—our boys who died,
By earth and air and sea in boyhood's prime?
God knows! But if ghost-feet still strut and side
About their clubs, if ghost-eyes read this rhyme,
I think they'd like their vanished epoch's swan-song
To be a merry tune, and not a wan song.

So clear the stage, and ring the curtain up!
Once more—ere Empires yield to Leagues of Nations,
And bayonets to Socialistic gup—
Let Beauty, in diaphanous creations,
Ogle the stalls, and subsequently sup
Off iced champagne and ortolan collations...
Whereafter, if my pen won't bring me pelf,
Damned if I don't turn Socialist myself!

III

Sets forth, despite the Law's dull interference,
A lady's birth, age, family, and appearance

III

Arms have I sung full oft, both steel and white ones;
Guns have I sung till I can sing no more;
Men have I sung, both common and polite ones:
Yet never sang *one* heroine before.
Come then, my ghost-girls, dark, fair, plump, and slight ones,
Come in the finest, flimsiest frocks ye wore....
Alas, not one of you quite fills the bill—
A life-size model for my lady Jill.

Pardon then, Magda, Gladys, Nancy, Florence,
Doris, Patricia, Mollie, Celandine,
Nor hold your erstwhile suitor in abhorrence
Because, from one, he takes eyes subtly green;
From other, hands a Sargent or a Lawrence
Had envied for his canvas; here, the sheen
Of gold hair, auburn-shot, in whose abundance,
What time Jill dreamed, young Cupids watched the sun dance;

There a smooth throat, an arched attractive
ankle,
Soft cheek, curved back in bloom to close-set
ear,
Red mouth full-lipped, a voice whose love-tones
rankle
Still in this heart of mine,—a voice so dear
That . . . But no more! In fear this rhyming
prank'll
Offend some damozel whom I revere,
I state: Jill's just an ordinary blonde,
Fair, frail, flirtatious, rather fast than fond.

You know the type—aristo-plutocratic,
Out of blue blood by hard North Country
cash;
A self-assertive sire; a dam, lymphatic
(Since rarely strawberry leaves and sovereigns
clash);
Their sole son, daring in the diplomatic
(Thumping his Underwood while kingdoms
crash);
Their daughter. . . Is there man alive can swear
Exactly what she did or did not dare?

For Jill was one of those astounding females,
Born in a chaster, pre-Edwardian day;
When lone Lucindas dared nor dine nor tea-males
For dread lest scandal dub them "*coryphée*";
When none drank deep of D'Abernonian dream-
ales,
But quietly our Empire went its way,
Nor realised that subalterns on horses
Monopolised the brain-power of its Forces:

One who was yet a span from flapperhood,
Still puzzling o'er the simplest of equations;
What time in robe of saffron Phœbus stood,
And all our Lanes were gay with green carnations,
And private hansoms sought the Johnian Wood,
And the shrill cycle-bell's first tintillations
Resounded from the dawning to the dark
In a Rolls-Royceless, Peter Pan-less Park:

One who attained the pig-tail's ribboned dowry
And helped to pass a Kipling tambourine,
When first from lands of wattle, maple, Maori,
Men came at summons of a dying Queen:
One who, at Auteuil, Dresden, and Rathgowrie,
Acquired that polish reft of which, I ween,
It is not possible for our Dianas
To emulate a modern *grande dame's* manners:

One on whose head the ostrich-feathers nodded
In Alexandrine courts—and *chez* Bassano;
In whose young ears, song's angels disembodied,
Rang the last notes of Melbourne's own soprano;
Whose lithe feet, Moykoff-shod, the grouse-moors plodded,
Or danced the new Machiché Brasiliano,
In times before, unchaperoned of skinny ma,
Suburbia's daughters sought the darkling kinema:

To put the matter briefly—One of Them.
Bear witness, Muses Nine, how most unworthy
Is my gold nib to touch their garments' hem.
Say, Byron (for as bard I still prefer thee
To all whose pallid minor stars be-gem
These Gotha nights), would not such task deter thee
From the rhymed octave—sometime known as Whistlecraft—
In which, poor ass, I ply this weekly thistle-craft.

Οἴμοι! that I can never be a poet
Modelled on spoon-fed college Adonäises,
Whose metres reek of Porson, Jebb, and Jowett,
Whose very thoughts derive from donnish däises.
Alas! for us who, writing life, must know it—
Its gold, its dross, its ladies and its Läises.
Alas! for my refusal to disseminate—
Even in verse—the scholarly-effeminate.

And oh! ten thousand times alas, should Jill
Be recognised in these Parnassian pages.
Woe for the libel action, and the bill
Which he must face who in the law engages.
And ah! thank Heaven for a metric skill
That shields this head from Justice Darling's rages . . .
Safeguarded by thy last experience, G. Moore,
I maiden-name my lady—Lewis-Seymour.

IV

In which the author, contrary to custom,
Goes for the gloves—as Sohrab went for Rustum.

IV

I HAVE discovered, after much perusal
Of Cannan, George, Mackenzie, Walpole, Bennett,
A Law whose discipline brooks no refusal,
A neo-rheo-literary tenet
Which runs : " In art, forbear to pick and choose.
All
That happens, happens. Wherefore, up and pen it.
Let the scribe's tale be casual and cursory ;
End where you like—but start us in the nursery."

And so I fain had traced, through many a canto,
My heroine : all dimples in her cot ;
Bored with her lessons ; laughing at the panto. ;
Immersed in " Fauntleroy " or Walter Scott :
But, since green herbs from memory's *campo santo*
Provide no flavouring for satire's pot,
For seething, bubbling cauldron such as this is,
I'll cut the cackle and commence the kisses.

* * * * *

'Tis such a night as only London knew
In the full seasons of our heart's content,
When, like some fairy pageant in review,
Love, Pleasure, Luxury together blent,
Made life not all too boring for the Few;
And Unemployment, fix't at ten per cent.,
Furnished—by means of charity bazaars—
Right many a dame with perquisites and "pars."

London, in London's June! Above, the starshine:
Below, against the rails of Berkeley Square,
The patient lights of brougham or rarer car shine,
Waiting stiff-shirted squires and ladies fair:
Music, from high French windows that afar shine,
Thrills, till a dancer well might curse and swear,
And call himself a "dashed unlucky fella"
To miss the Lewis-Seymours' Cinderella.

Within those halls, where plush-breeched flunkeys stand,
What sounds, what scents, what visions of delight!
How—to the bluest Blue Hungarian band—
Youth whirls away the unreturning night!
How—perfumed as the blooms of Samarcand—
The dying flow'rets whisper, "Carlton White"!
But, oh! to weary war-time ration-hunters,
How like a dream, this stand-up supper—Gunter's.

For here, in reach of every slender hand which is
Scarce languidly outstretched to porcelain plate
Are dainties drawn from each vale, stream, or
strand which is
Most famed for fruit or fish or fowl or cate:
Creamed strawberries; thin, lavish-buttered
sandwiches
Of livered geese (that now squawk Hymns of
Hate),
Of priceless hams and tongues and caviar; ices;
And sugared sweets in myriad strange devices. . . .

Yet sweeter far than all these sweet things, Jill is:
Queen of my verse and this "Young People's
Dance":
Fairer than fairest of Mayfairy fillies:
Sweet, is the smile that lights a countenance
Bright as moon-dappled, pink-tipped lotus-lilies;
Sweet, are her jade-green eyes that gleam and
glance,
And give no hint of yester-tea-time's flare-up
When stern mamma forbade her bind her hair up.

Jill's hair! How beautiful it is; the tresses
Warm-golden, soft as cygnet's earliest downing.
Jill's foot! How slim the arch the flounce
caresses.
Jill's lips! How red a cup for love's en-
drowning.
(My Muse! How easily the jade impresses
On this base coin a stamp of pseudo-Browning.)
Jill's youth! Jill's dreams! These luxuries that
lap her! . . .
Don't they present a most alluring flapper?

So thinks, at least, this lad in evening raiment—
Shoes, shirt-front, collar, waistcoat-buttons glowing;
This sub. of other days, when soldier's payment
Scarcely sufficed each monthly mess-bill's owing
And triple stars full fifteen years' delay meant;
He, who presents the goblet, overflowing
With icy rubies to its crinkled brim,
And asks if Jill won't "sit this out" with him. . . .

And there it hangs, word-carven, my last image.
(Browning again! now Keats!) O hapless pair,
Loth lover and bold maiden of a dim age,
Lost to us now, and dead, but still most fair.
O Attic shapes! Arcadian girlhood's slim age,
And silken youth with brilliantined hair!
What climaxes must I not sacrifice,
Who write this epic at a weekly price?

For—as long melodies are sweet, but sweeter
Poems in short instalments, such as mine—
Seven full days, teased puppet of this metre,
Must thy parched tongue await that roseate wine;
Seven full nights, fond boy, must thou entreat her;
Whilst mantle to her cheeks, incarnadine,
Youth's beauty, beauty's youth—and readers vex't
Know, need know, nothing more till Tuesday next.

V

Brings life to week-old statues ; makes them prance
To love's light tune—and ends the Seymours' dance.

V

Pale shapes I locked in memory's studio,
Your draperies stir. From vein to marble vein
The life-blood leaps. Eyes gleam, and pulses glow.
Once more my octaves rap their old refrain
To re-create the weekly puppet-show.
Fond boy, to work! My Jill's herself again,
And answers your entreaty, sideways glancing,
"Perhaps I will. It's jolly hot for dancing."

So they twain pass—smart sub. and flapper stately—
From the high halls of Gunter's prank't refection,
And out across the waxèd boards, where lately
Twirled the swift waltz to *La Poupée's* "Selection."
And on, past couples gossiping sedately;
And on, past couples screened against detection;
To a dim-shaded, fairy-lighted alcove,
Fit haunt for languorous maiden and her tall cove:—

Such as—in land of Taj Mahal and mugger,
Where girls book weeks ahead their supper-dances—
Screens some pale flirt, some lad who yearns to hug her,
From the brown *khitmatghar's* averted glances.
(Who knows thy secrets, darkling *Kala-juggah:*
The orbs down-cast, the fingers' coy advances,
The swiftly stifled sob that hooks the stripling—
Save I, Victoria Cross, and Rudyard Kipling?)

And there, beneath the new-sponged potted palm-tree,
That mid-day brought and morning shall remove—
Mayfair's own wind-unruffled, ever-calm tree,
Whose drooping branches shield Mayfairies' love—
She lisps of Waller parts, and thy dead charm, Tree
(Twin stars now shining in the "flies" above);
While he admits he has or hasn't seen them . . .
Till a shy sudden silence falls between them,

A cloud across the sun of lightling banter.
O Jill, my gold-spoon cake-and-Möet miss,
Hast thou not dreamed, since thy first tam-o'-shanter,
Of soldier boy, of dance-night such as this?
Faintly they catch the polka's throb, the canter
Of homing hansom-cab where lovers kiss:
And "Oh," thinks he, "what eyes, what lips, what hair, too!"
And "Oh," thinks she, "the ninny doesn't dare to."

Voiceless, they sit : but now her eyes, up-turning,
Seek his : and now, beneath the lashes' veil,
Leaps a quick flame to set youth's pulses burning :
And now she feels her resolution fail :
And now gains strength anew the curious yearning
For first adventure : now, her fingers frail
Tighten about the kerchief's lacy tissue :
And now, at last, he says, " Jill, I *must* kiss you."

" Bobbie, you mustn't." " Jill—just one." Her shoulder
Stiffens ; resists the half-encircling arm.
Hands fend away the hand that seeks to hold her.
Lips murmur. Lashes flutter in alarm.
" No, Bobbie. No." My foolish boy, be bolder ;
The moment's fear is half the moment's charm . . .
Alas ! His missed and amateurish peck
Grazes the ear-lobe ; lands upon the neck.

Readers, both kissed and kissless, chide not ; pity
These withered weeds from Jill's dead seas of dreaming.
Think—or in France, or in this barraged city,
How many a dear one owes his brass hat's gleaming,
How many a husband thanks his safe Committee,
To some fond woman's sound strategic scheming !
Ponder—can crafts which men from want to plenty ship,
Be steered without an arduous apprenticeship ?

Ponder! Nor blame my Jill if she disguises
Love's disappointment in disapprobation,
If, Artemis in judgment now, she rises,
The outraged goddess, armed for flagellation;
And, with a voice whose every note comprises
Disgust, revolt, pain, virtue, indignation,
Drives from her father's chaste, offended portals
The meekest of apologising mortals.

And blame not me, her bard—whose verses weave her
This coronal of memory's budding-hours,
Who loved her long ago, yet now must leave her
Lorn 'mid the dance's *débris*, and the flowers
Which wilt as day-dreams of that first deceiver—
Because, while yet War ravens and devours,
While still the blind guns thunder out in Flanders,
I sing the type which cozens and philanders.

For, young as Spring and old as Cleopatra,
Certain as Nature's self, this type endureth:
On Skindles' lawn, in jungles of Sumatra,
She blooms—a wax-white weed that no rake cureth:
From Westminster to *wats* of Pura Chatra,
Her false lips smile, her gladsome optic lureth:
WAACs may be WRENs; wars, peace; to-day's full Colonel,
To-morrow's clerk . . . but Jill is sempiternal.

VI

Continues—symptomatically terse—
The world's first serial in doggerel verse.

VI

O Jill, my peerless, perfumed, powdered darling ;
Quintessence of all fairies I've adored
In London's lanes, by Devon Budleigh's far ling,
At Berkeley's, Kettner's, Ritz's, Carlton's board ;
Jill, whose white hands ne'er knew rough house-work's gnarling ;
Whose clothes not twenty Coxes could afford :
How shall man sing the seasoned cee-sprung carriage
In which you rolled from that first kiss to marriage ?

What days they were ! What noon-times and what twilights !
The whole wide earth seemed fashioned for your pleasure ;
Its very heavens, gold-and-crystal skylights
Whereunder you picked orchid-blooms at leisure.
For others, shadowed gloom ; for you, the high lights—
The pomp, the pride, the dance's twanging measure . . .
And if one begged : "Take coin," you'd say, "and toss it her.
Poor thing ! That skirt was never cut by Rossiter."

Dear, *rotten* days ! And yet, a Jack grows wistful
At thoughts of all the Jills whom he remembers,
In times when he had fivers by the fist-full
And fires of youth—where now are only embers.
Jack's Jills ! Why, Muse possesses quite a list full,
May's Jill, and June's Jill, August's, and September's . . .
Yet dares no more than skim each light adventure
Which followed on flirtationship's indenture.

For there's a tide in the affairs of flappers,
Of those, at least, that West End mothers breed—
(Your Wapping matron's more inclined to slap *hers:*
A vulgar trick—yet one which serves some need :)—
A spring-time blood-tide, mounting to young nappers,
Heady as wine, a mischief-making mead,
Which—though a man find every known excuse for 'em—
To put it mildly, does the very deuce for 'em.

And shall my sweetest Muse, than whom none chaster
E'er fluttered to console the middle-age-time
Of any neurasthenic poetaster,
Ope her full throat to sing Jill's 'prentice rage-time ?
The unnerving doubts, the certainties which braced her,
The follied moments and the ensuing sage time,
The major and the minor bards who sung to her,
The men who knelt, the " little friends " who clung to her ;

The last strange morning-dreams, the tea-tray's rattle,
The letters—opened, skimmed and tossed aside;
The leisured getting-up, the breakfast-prattle,
The summoning 'phone-bell and the mid-day ride;
The lunch; the afternoons of tittle-tattle—
Town's latest scandal, dance, divorce or bride;
The "dear boys," climbers, *partis*, portion-stalkers;
The furtive teas at Charbonnel and Walker's;

The Morny-scented bath before the dinner;
The deft maid's fingers in the unruly hair;
The *risqué* talk of some sweet social sinner,
Half-heard across the table's candle-glare;
The Bridge, so much too high for a beginner;
The Ball; the moment's whisper on the stair;
The thousand faces, phases, thoughts, books, travellings,
Which whirl youth's silk cocoon in its unravellings.

Ah no! not ours with huckstering pen to retail
How slumb'rous beauties wake from girl-time's dozing.
Let Hubert Wales and D. H. Lawrence detail
The purfled passion-blossom's slow unclosing.
No rainbow's purple e'er shall tinge our she-tale,
No censor's yoke restrain its swift composing.
Moreover—quite apart from Muse's purity—
There's nothing half so dull as immaturity.

So please imagine—(though I know it's risky
To trust in Britons for imagination,
Save those rare few whom peace-time's hoarded whisky
Still fires to spiritual exaltation,
Or such as stand, when questioning House grows frisky,
Pat on their first inspired asseveration)—
Jill as she was in times of sugared plenty:
The Bond Street goddess, *ætat* three-and-twenty.

Goddess, indeed! These meagre days that skimp us,
Poor mortals, bullied, badged, and bombed and rationed,
Scarce know that breed which once on high Olympus
Flaunted in radiant raiment, Poiret-fashioned.
Goddess indeed! A self-sure, jade-eyed, slim puss,
Of life's each latest luxury impassioned;
Sleek; mateless; restless; rampant; supple-sinewed;
Sharp-clawed; capricious; and . . . *to be continued.*

VII

Our author—having sung his prolegomenon—
Shews Jill in love: a most unique phenomenon.

VII

O GREAT Asquiffian age, when Britain's poor *res*
Was half destroyed by visionary Catos
And waiting seers. *O tempora! O mores*
Of Epicurus—finer far than Plato's!
O Bacchic swards: O gardens of Dolores,
Splendid with rose-blooms, sterile of potatoes:
O work-rights bartered for imported pottages:
O happy Few: O happy week-end "cottages"!

Which last—the Lewis-Seymours'—now I sing....
Here, as the gold sun seeks his cloudy pillow,
While, black on emerald river-lawns of spring,
Lengthen the shades of privet-hedge and willow,
Sits Alastair: one white hand pencilling
The ever-mounting score which he and Jill owe;
What time their two opponents, rising, bless
The coming-off of that last deep finesse;

And all about the card-flecked baize foregather
The brilliant members of the Seymour party :
Sir Thomas Sope, J.P., the King of Lather,
With Lady Sope, broad-beamed, benignant, hearty ;
Hubert Fitzturf, well up in racing blather ;
Miss Corinth Tose—whose latest dance, "Astarte,"
Revéaled, a short week since, to gasping London
How all save Art, for Art, must be left undone.

Mr. and Mrs. Cromwell-Rhode—nonentities ;
That peer for whom both maiden low and high sighs,
Lord Reggie Strar—of marrying propensities
Which ever veer 'twixt absolutes and nisis ;
Jill's sire—unsure of all his guests' identities ;
Jill's mother—busy twining mental splice-eyes,
Fearful lest one whose feet might tread a palace stair,
Should haply wed "that impecunious Alastair."

Yet when—since first a nameless bard did proffer
To Cretan tribes Europa's Zeus-bred ox-myth—
Has he who fills the Courts and bares the coffer,
Who laughs at Bok, Divorce Reform, and locksmith ;
Young Cupid, mad-cap mischief-making scoffer,
Careless alike to please Brown-Jones or shock Smith ;
Ta'en thought if those at whose fond hearts he shoots
Can heal them with gold-beater's skin *chez* Coutts' ?

* * * * *

Lang syne have vintage ports and hot-house peaches
Passed, in the butler's solemn arms, away.
Now, silver o'er the mirrored river-reaches,
Sable 'neath banks with rush and iris gay,
Broods the mooned night. Now, closer far than leeches,
Stick the high bridgers to their auction-play.
Yet two there are who waste nor time nor cash on
That lesser game which erst was all their passion.

Theirs is the sheer Greek magic of the night;
The crescent silvern splendour of the moon;
The sleeping rose-buds, yellow, red, and white;
The daisy-elves that dance with silent shoon
On velvet lawns for fairy queens' delight.
Theirs is sweet Nature's every priceless boon,
For which, in England's war-less, wheat-less soils,
Year in, year out, the rich man's gardener moils.

And there's a strange new softness in Jill's eyes;
And in Jill's weary soul strange thoughts are thronging,
Like little stars new-lit in darkling skies:
Just to be with *him* always: just a longing
To leave this world of scandal, bridge, and lies,
And foolish clothes, and constant meal-times' gonging . . .
For Love, as servant girls, in this our nation
Ever desires a change of situation.

Her soul is *his*. Her hand is on his cheek.
He knows the perfumed glory of her hair,
Her willing lips, scarce breathing as they speak
His name, "My own! My darling! Alastair!"
Her slim young arms, her throbbing heart, her sleek
Warm throat. And, all a younger son may dare
For dear love's sake, he vows . . . and so forgets
All his expensive tastes and half his debts.

"Yours—yours for ever, Alastair." Her voice
Thrills low as music heard o'er waves afar.
"My Jill! My sweetheart! Woman of my choice!"
"Man of all dreams! My new soul's guiding-star! . . ."
And, once again, her clinging lips rejoice;
Her brimmed eyes mirror passion's avatar:
And, once again, the hot blood throbs like wine
Through nestling form his eager arms entwine. . . .

Ah leave them, leave them, lonely by the river,
Their world, their whisky, and their bridge forgot!
Morn shall bring headaches, heart-aches, tears, and liver,
Morn shall unloose night's matrimonial knot:
For though Dan Cupid of the silver quiver
Has arrows both for mansion and for cot,
Ten bull's-eyes with the former hardly matter
As much as one poor "outer" with the latter.

VIII

Wherein Jill's torn heart wondereth if that *rent*
Be worse than dowdy clothes and unpaid flat-rent.

VIII

Already Dawn, that rosy-fingered hussy,
Had laced his marching-boots on Brother Day;
Already maids were up, and bees were buzzy,
And morning teas a-rattle on the tray;
When Jill awoke—her dear head yet all muzzy
With passion's dreams; and pondered, as she lay
In Coty'd warmth among her lace-edged pillows,
On last night's happenings beneath the willows.

How fine he was, her promised! How her whole
Rapt being thrilled at thought of his embraces!
How—soul once linked for aye with linkèd soul
In one of Town's exclusive mating-places—
They would fare forth to seek love's shining goal
With Starry eyes and Daily-Mirrored faces!
"Let all our world," she cried, "with scorn and malice stare,
I'll wed none other than my darling Alastair."

But then, as freckles on the fairest skin come
(Though these, claims George, oft lure a blooming rover);
Or as swift skaters who round Prince's rink hum,
Missing their edge, lose balance and crash over;
Came other thoughts: his debts, tastes, mortgaged income.
Till, sudden, that dream-journeying to Dover,
For which her waking mind had booked its ticket,
Seemed thirdest class. And: "I, we, couldn't stick it,

The narrow life of poverty," she cried:
"A tiny house in Half Moon or in Green Street—
Three servants (four, at most)—one horse to ride—
Hired cars—a month at Monte quite a queen's treat—
Cheap hats (last season's feathers 'cleaned and dyed')—
Frocks from a 'little woman' in some mean street—
No baccarat, no racing, and no Ritzing—
And poor old Alastair for ever gritsing. . . .

Ah no! it cannot be." Yet still soft heart
Played traitor to cash-calculating brain.
Must they, who loved as never lovers, part?
Their troth, their trust, their trifling—all be vain? . . .
Poor Jill! E'en Smart Set's love-wounds sometimes smart.
Poor Jill—who wept; and wished, and wished again,
She were some Kaffir maid—her dress, a cowrie:
Or, failing that, possessed a Leiter dowry.

* * * * *

But what—the reader asks (the Lord knows wherefore
Readers should put imaginary queries)—
What of young Alastair? Does he still care for
This wickedest of Mayfair's fallen peris?
Does he not know she'd rather preen in vair for
Some boodled noble, rich in Rands or Eries?
Does he not guess, as valet warms his shirt,
That Jill's a soulless, Glyn-eyed, green-eyed flirt?

Fond reader—(Lord knows why we bards reply to
Questions unasked, or why a reader's "fond")—
Come, let us take Pegasian wings, and fly to
Alastair's chamber. See! the shirt is donned;
The collar pinned; and tied the priceless tie, too.
And hark! he speaks: "I've always liked 'em blonde;
An' Jill's a ripper; an' of course we're pally.
But marriage . . . Best forget about it, Ally."

* * * * *

Ah, sad hearts severed by the curse of Mammon!
Never I ween—since first I learned the fling
Of metric fly that hooks the rhyme's fat salmon—
Was spied so piteous a breakfasting.
Ne'er, from the Dresden plate she cut her ham on,
Jill raised her eyes: nor e'er went capon's wing,
Though devilled to a turn and bacon-basted,
As Alastair's, so utterly untasted.

And as the food-fain guests came wandering down
To dally with the matutinal platter,
Plainly to each appeared—from Ally's frown
And Jill's wan smile—that "something was the matter." . . .
Yet vainly Hubert wagered half-a-crown
To buy Jill's thoughts; and vain was all the chatter
With which Miss Tose confided to Lord Reggie
That, "Alastair looked most uncommon edgy."

For these were lovers of the bull-dog breed,
True Humphry-Ward-*cum*-Kipling Anglo-Saxons;
Not such as mouth the high heart's mating-need,
Or blare the soul's untimely hurt through Klaxons;
But single-purposed, steadfast to the creed:
As it were, sentimental Stonewall Jacksons.
Wherefore must I—since "Art's elimination"—
Betray no detail of that separation.

Nay! Not for all the brains Whitehall has wasted,
Nor all the brass that decks its swollen head,
Nor all the paper brave Sir Hedley pasted,
Nor all the swords of Morgan, wordy-red,
Would I decant the bitter wine these tasted—
The much they spoke, the more they left unsaid;
Or shew Jill sobbing out, with crumpled hanky,
"And now you'll marry some rich *horrid* Yankee."

Nay: by the Gods of Literature (illusions?)—
Nay: by the Seven U-Boat-haunted Seas—
Nay: by the twin Magnificent Contusions
(Pemberton-Billing's gore and Archer-Shee's)!
My merry muselet of the glad effusions
Shuns high-falutin' tragedies like these;
And leaves the final love-scenes of such star clay
To bead a rosary for Florrie Barclay.

IX

When fractured hearts wax over-sentimental,
Naught helps so much as travel—Continental.

IX

Alas for Love! When once that cross-eyed
babe—
The stunting air-boy with acute myopia,
Whose loops nor sextant tracks nor astrolabe—
Has poured us poison from his cornucopia,
No patent drug from land of Lincoln (Abe)
Avails to heal the spirit's misanthropia;
No scalpel'd knight, no Harley-Streeted pill-*vir*
Can guarantee to cure our souls for silver.

So some seek solace in divorce; and some
By the spate-bubbling salmon-streams of Nor-
roway;
Some quaff th' embittered cocktail, or the rum
Whose swizzled headaches heavy on to-morrow
weigh:
But most, Dame Fortune's dreamed and distant
drum
Lures with its thump along that parterred
borrow-way,
Where, ever sequent 'midst the Eternal Zeros,
Queux finds his spies; the Williamsons, their heroes.

O fairer far than Kosciusko's ranges,
Than Denmark's Hill, than Ootie or Darjeeling:
Sweet mount, whose *râteau* soon or late estranges
Each spieler from the bullion of his spieling:
Monte! where yester's *mille* to-day's small change is;
Where aye the painted circle, slowly wheeling,
Lures deftly to that one unwagered socket
The ivory ball which devastates our pocket:

Dear fane, above whose pillared portals nestle
Unnumbered myriads of unmurdered blue-rocks:
Dear votaries, who throng the baizèd trestle
Where fortune's rescued barque aye strikes on new rocks:
Dear *voisins*, frequent maximumed of Jessel:
Dear—and now haply cleansed-of-Berlin-Jew rocks:
How far more potent than a touting Tank
The premiumed magnet of your golden Bank!

How oft, in some wild Western whizz-banged dug-out,
Where guttered to all draughts my rationed taper,
(Tho' nary a window let my Woodbine's fug out),
Has my soul flown from Staff-emitted paper
To the glad days, when from my purse I'd lug out
That last fat stake—and watch the white sphere caper—
And plank my *plaques*—and hear the *croupier* say:
"*Tout va, Monsieur*" . . . and lose, and turn away:

How oft, what time my gas-wise nostrils shook
At thought of death ingloriously smelly,
Have I exclaimed: "Ah, bed me not with Brooke,
With Brother Byron, Sister Keats, or Shelley:
But speed my hapless corse—per Messrs. Cook—
Safe to the bar of Princess Aubanellie;
And let one Anglo-Saxon poet's ashes—
Just for the change—lie lightly where some cash is!"

* * * * *

'Twas a chill afternoon of earliest year:
(Who sings the *tropic* Riviera—lies):
Fine snow-flakes flecked the garden-walks; and drear,
La Turbie spired it to the lowering skies.
The pigeons shivered. Came no wight to cheer,
With over-trusting purse, the shopman's eyes.
The "Galerie" was empty. Not a Jewess
Had bought one hat since *déjeuner* from Lewis.

From her high window at the "Hermitage,"
Looked forth my Jill on white, deserted square;
On dripping rooves of *pension* or *garage*;
On café tables, marble-topped and bare;
O'er snow-capped kiosk, to the rock-bound *plage*
Where only suicides take *bains de mer:*
And sighed; and thought, "Midst such funereal glooms,
There's nothing for it but those stuffy 'Rooms.'"...

Yet lingered still by that lace-curtained window
Lost in some wild-rose maiden reverie—
A finer, a more exquisitely-skinned doe
Than all who, in these darkling nights and free,
To Boots' creams or powders Valaze-tinned owe
Their Cuthbert-kissed complexion's purity . . .
Fine fleur of Albion's stateliest orchid-houses,
She dreamed—like shop-girls—*louis d'or* and spouses.

For never, since that too, too happy May-day
By the smooth reaches of the upper Thame,
When first she knew requited passion's hey-day
With Alastair, had life been "quite the same."
"Always"—but mostly after quarter's pay-day,
Or at the finish of a long, dull game—
Her soul was conscious of a "something missing":
Something that neither clothes could give, nor kissing,

Nor e'en a five-fold-passing hand at "chemmy":
Something girls lose who *won't* when we beseech 'em,
Be they of Jill's great world, or of the semi:
Something that only marriage seems to teach 'em;
That haunts patrician coiffures, diamond-gemmy,
In the ten-guinea'd opera box of Beecham,
And sits—a feathered bird of evil bode—
On Sally's noddle in the Walworth Road.

And so Jill thought of married love, thrice holy,
And the moon tracing shadows on the lawn,
Of why the long months ebbed away so slowly,
And why she never slept a wink till dawn,
And why she'd funked that thousand-franc paroli,
And why her dress-account was over-drawn . . .
Till—as some squire who brings proud knight his spurs—
Parker appeared with hat, gloves, purse, and furs.

X

Displays—a scene of horrid impropriety—
High play, as ever, rampant in Society.

X

Shall Fashion's goddess, earthward-stooping, scramble
For mortal seats in commonplace Casino?
Herd with the crowd, where broken tipsters shamble
And the sleek *rasta* reeks of maraschino?
Shall Jill's white fingers, Cartier-circled, gamble
With such as ne'er one single Bond Street bean owe?
Ah no! Those angel wings shall only rub
Patrician shoulders at the "Sporting Club."

Thither her secret way the maiden wended,
Down tube-like passages electric-lit.
Safely she passed those slopes, and unattended;
For there alway do watchful guardians sit,
Lest evil hap. And passing, much perpended
If to locked money-box's warden slit
Few hard-won coins should find their meagre way,
Or if—"for just this once"—she'd really *play*.

But when, in fee for cloak-room-tendered sables,
Her gloved hand grasped the gleaming disc which shewed
That last best number of the hazard-tables—
Trente-six: then, sudden, hope unreasoned glowed
In gambler's breast: and, as snow slips from gables
Or tyre unstudded skids on greasy road,
So slipped and skidded, powerless to restrain,
Each cog of caution in the gambler's brain.

Swift as young wife when first she goes a-pawning
Some wedding-trinket from her lord and master;
So swift trod Jill—the slow lift's welcome scorning—
Up those rugged stairs of gilt and alabaster.
Heedless of gorgeous flunkeys duly fawning;
Heedless if triumph waited or disaster;
Heedless of all save that clasped cloak-room token
She crossed the threshold of the Bank Unbroken.

Gods, what a scene was there! My poor Onoto
Self-fills with shudders at its own ambition.
Not Homer's self could hope to name *in toto*,
Not e'en the "New York Herald's" French edition,
That crowd magnificent: those dames whose photo
Had graced our "Tatler's" frontispiece position,
Those languid lords of Art, Heart, Steel and Steal,
Who thronged the Temple of the Spinning Wheel.

For here a Duchess edged her five-franc stake on,
Eyed of some scornful Gaby, plaques in paw:
Yonder an Illinoisy queen of bacon
Wailed at her loss: and there pleased clients saw
An unmoved *croupier* ply profaning rake on
The fattest counsel-fees of Albion's law:
Here played Bass-Freebody, M.P., whose main power
Lay rather in his money-bags than brain-power;

There, by smooth scion of the clan MacStubbs,
Famed for Free Trade and Mutual Protection,
Counted his gains the artist Druzzler-Grubs,
Whose colouring ne'er touched his wife's complexion:
While yonder Sydney Strop—whom nineteen clubs
Had pilled each time he came up for election—
Borrowed with much *sang froid* from Moses Goatheim
A *mille* which his *chère amie* lost in no time. . . .

But what cared Jill for Grand Dukes, *Principini*,
For ladies slow, fast, brazen-faced or shy;
Or the great Balkan tenor, Salvarsini,
Who sang high notes but played them yet more high;
For Russ, Yank, Dago, Teuton, Gaul, or Sheeney,
Or e'en her father's not-too-watchful eye?
Baizewards she strode—and ere the ball could tarry,
Announced three *louis* on the *dernier carré*.

* * * * *

"*Trente-six, rouge, pair et passe!*" . . . Judge
ye who know
The flatling years that yeasty luck-runs leaven,
If there be moment on our earth below
More like a plunger's tinselled dream of heaven
Than this of Jill's, who sees three *louis* grow
As by a miracle to twenty-seven;
And round the left *mise* plastering coins two
score, . . .
Hears the ball click, the table gasp: "*Encore.*"

"*À vous le plein, Madame.*" Keen brains unravel
The riddled sum. "*Deux louis—soizante-dix.*"
Rake-slid across the baize, the piled coins travel.
"*Neuf louis à cheval, trente-cinq—trente-six:*
Payés." Like gold-dust from Pactolian gravel,
Pours out the lidded *caisse* each stake's in-
crease.
"*Carrés.*" "*Transversale simple.*" "*Et pleine.*"
Jill's knees
Shake as she dares it: "*Doublez toutes les mises;*

Et maximum en plein . . ." Now, high heart thudding,
Breathless, she waits. "*Messieurs, vos jeux.*"
The ball
Back-flipped from finger, hums, a white streak scudding
Round the grooved circle; slows. . . . She knows the call,
"*Plus rien*"; sees crazed ivory leap the studding—
Bound on the brass—hang—slither—poise and fall;
Peers; doubts; makes certain; tingles fortune-struck:
Hears in five tongues, "*Three* times. My God, what luck."

And there—her stakes still ordered in their places,
On the marked baize clean-raked of losers' gold—
While yet, slow-circling in the wheel's embraces,
The resting ball its magic number told—
Her face, 'midst all those gaping, gasping faces,
Calm as the *chef de parti's*, and as cold—
Her winnings raining Danäe-like around her—
Her love-wounds cured—Jill's envious father found her.

XI

Changes the scene to lands of Raphael, Dante, Caruso, Borgia, Gnocchi and Chianti.

XI

In that glad age when Muse and I blued capital—
(And whence we now draw not-too-dusty dividends;
Finding that, since the War God sought to scrap it all
And turn the peacefullest crank to serve his livid ends,
If we poor bloodless milk, our readers lap it all
From Passion's prologue down to True Love's vivid ends)—
Our busied pleasure-class could only spare a
Brief six weeks' sojourn on the Riviera.

So memory's glass reveals departure's morning—
Time somewhere round eleven o' the clock—
And Lewis-Seymours, travel-garbed, adorning
Monte's clean platform, walled of sea and rock;
Père; mère; Jill's self, white-veiled and sun-shade-scorning,
Peerless in *Reboux* hat and *Callot* frock;
Miss Parker, rug and jewel-case beladen;
The valet, sad for loved, lost chamber-maiden.

And now the bell announces train's arrival;
And now she fusses, puffing, into view.
Now may safe winner bless won gold's survival;
Now must broke loser face hard world anew:
Now comes the *concierge* with last contrival—
The baggage-check—to double *pourboire's* due,
What time from out their halted Pullmans streel
Fresh pilgrims to the Mecca of the Wheel. . . .

Sweet muselet mine! whom tax-collectors harry,
On whose belaurelled brow full many a rate weighs,
How gladly would thy weary pinions tarry,
Just one more canto, 'neath those gilded gate-ways
Where the plump pigeons labour not, nor carry,
Nor any Gotha hums its futile hate-ways:
But we, alas! have many a verse to dree more,
And so must travel Rome-wards with Jill Seymour.

* * * * *

Gloved quiet hands on uncut novel rested,
Listless she watched the seascape glinting by;
The terraced landward slopes; the hamlets, nested
Saffron where crag-line cuts the depth of sky;
Cap Martin; Menton, Kensington-infested;
Barred Ventimiglia, whose *douaniers* ply,
Couple by couple and with *scusi*'s plenty,
The chalk that never doubts our drawled "*Niente*."

Listless she sat through lunch, and introspective;
Heard the wheels droning under her, the clatter
Of dish near-spilled, her father's terse invective,
Her mother's wifty social chitter-chatter;
And thought: "Is this then life's entire objective—
Enjoyment? Aren't there other things that matter,
Such as . . ." But here imagination's steed
Pecked at the fence of introspection's need;

And stumbled—like a Georgian poet's verse
Whose stresses fail to hold the pace that kills.
"For, after all," urged brain, "things might be worse.
You've won enough to settle half your bills;
Bought hats galore, three frocks, that new gold purse . . .
Jill Seymour grousing! Why, compared with Jill's,
Most women's lives are absolutely rotten . . .
Moreover, *l'affaire* Alastair's forgotten."

Whereat—alas, my heroine! shallow-hearted
As the frail fair who pack Nevada's Reno—
Swifter than Doan cures backs which long have smarted;
Swifter than asthma flies thy lightnings, Veno;
Depression struck its bell-tents and departed . . .
And on, past many a green-embowered *villino*,
Past many a bougainvillea'd seaside station,
Curved *train-de-luxe* towards its destination.

Dreamy 'midst golden mandarines and roses,
High Bordighera queened it o'er the bay :
Sunlit where coast-line fold on fold uncloses,
Ospedaletti and San Remo lay—
Loved of Lurati, loved of her who poses
Sad by the sea-waves of some movie-play.
And now, beyond Savona sea-fog-hazy,
Gleams the lit harbour of the Genovesi.

Here, too, Muse mine, were paper only cheaper,
Chancely we'd find material for a canto :
Since well that rail-climbed cliff's *albergo*-keeper
Knows us, and well that tram-sought *campo santo* . . .
But duty calls—thee to connubial sleeper ;
Me to make certain lest thy cane portmanteau,
Purpose-mishandled of untipped *facchini*,
Here find its rest eternal—like Mazzini. . . .

'Tis safe! And now, sweet child, at speed undress thee.
These brazen hooks shall guard the silks of Worth,
This little net the Lentheric "slides" that tress thee ;
This mirror shew the daintiest face on earth
To thy fond lover, as he murmurs "Bless thee"
From the discomfort of his upper berth. . . .

"What, fast asleep already! Poor inspirer,
Strange how these metric honeymoonings tire her!"

XII

Presents to Anglo-Saxondom's democracy
A picture of the Italian aristocracy.

XII

Friends, Roman friends, who erstwhile lent polite eyes
To our faked films of gun and mine and tank—
(Though you, as we, preferred Borelli's bright eyes
Or Suzanne d'Armelle's five-reel-photoed prank)—
What time, with manifold salutes and right eyes,
White-gloved, field-booted, girt of sword and swank,
Green-tabbed, tri-lingual, glorious, we trod,
A mighty movie-king before the Rodd:

Friends, whose sweet vermouths soothed this *capitano*
When Foreign Office cables drove him dotty,
Whose fingers poured him golden teas *chez* Strano,
And thrilled him as he kissed them *buona notte:*
Can we repay those sweets *lontan' lontano*,
Those midnight cocktails of your flowered *salotti*,
With bitter dishes, burnt in satire's kitchens,
And poison-fruitful vine-juices of Hichens?

Avaunt the thought! Far rather will we
kneel—
Muselet and I—'midst ever-ruffled greenery,
Before the altar of the Great Un-reel;
And pray its clicking goddess of machinery
She grant us, from her fane of fireproof steel,
One fanlike ray to shew—in Roman scenery—
How walked, talked, tangoed, gambled, shopped
and flirted
Jill Seymour, Juno of the Hobble-Skirted.

So darken house! Let photo-fiction reign!
Tinkles anew the *maestro's* indicator.
Loudly the carbons sizzle and complain.
Now, peering down, espies the operator
Head steal to head, and hand clasp hand again.
Now thrown beam dazzles entering spectator;
Now the band blares, and screenward eyes dis-
cover:
"Scene XII. In Rome. Jill meets another lover."

And there they stand, on Trinitá dei Monti,—
Jill and her latest "flirt," dark Giulio,
Last of a long, broke line of papal *Conti*.
The City of the Hills lies spread below:
Domes; flat-roofed houses; river; plashing
fonti;
Piazza di Spagna—flower-booths aglow;
Via Condotti—cutting straight as arrow
Through crowded town its canyon deep and narrow;

Beyond, crests pine-crowned 'gainst a blue horizon . . .
"Here, where the waning centuries have set
As fair a jewel as wanderer casts eyes on,
Morn after happy morn, the lovers met" . . .
So reads the rune, and vanishes. Film flies on;
Scene follows scene, more swift than those which fret
Through mental lenses of a writer's brain
When memory calls the past to life again:—

The Pincio's shaded track. . . . "They rode together":
The garden lake . . . "and walked in the Borghese":
"A tango-tea" . . . Jill dancing light as feather,
Her glances driving Giulio nearly crazy:
"The tennis club" . . . in blowiest movie weather:
"A motor-drive to visit the Marchese" . . .
"Hunting in the Campagna" . . . "Bridge" . . .
"Frascati" . . .
"Latour's" . . . "A Porta Pia dinner-party" . . .

So flit the pictures. Here their Fiat crawls
At twilight-hour adown the twinkling Corso;
There, in the Campidoglio's freezing halls,
Chance-met (?) they stand before some sculptured torso;
Or, secret, seek those quaintly frescoed walls,
Where flirted much as Jill (or rather more so)
Whene'er Augustus visited her villa,
That perfect lady, Livia Drusilla. . . .

O halcyon Hunless days! How vain the trope
Which strives to limn each trivial employment,
Each pleasure-task that helped your children cope
With their one dreaded bogie—Unenjoyment:
What save the punchèd celluloid can hope
Explain how much each newly-purchased toy meant
To baby-folk, sleep-rocked in peace-time cradles,
Whose turtle soup was served from golden ladles?

Who save some flickering Balzac of the screen
Could shew that cosmopolitan "Society,"
Could write that epic of the epicene,
(Its loves, mere jests; its lusts, mere impropriety),
Where courtier Giulio sighed for Jill the queen,
And Rumour feasted Scandal to satiety,
Wagging its thousand tongues at thousand *pranzi*
If she but bowed to him in the "Costanzi"?

O Rome, Augustan Rome, whose bones ghost-haunted
Professor Boni's delving spade unsmothers!
In pagan times, when Vestal virgins flaunted,
And Emperors made mincemeat of their mothers,
When the Gaul died while blood-mad circus taunted,
Your sins *were* sins—not scenes for Pathé Brothers:
You who now need not Gibbon's pen, but Gibson
To draw those angels—good-as-gold, with bibs on—

Contessa, Principessa, Marchesina,
Who hinted as they sipped Excelsior cocktails,
With many a "*Com' é bella!*" "*Che divina!*"
How, were their lips not sealed, they could unlock tales
Anent friend Giulio and his *biondina* . . .
Some evidence for which unuttered shock-tales
My learned Muse, continuing her story,
Will now proceed to lay before the jury.

XIII

Teaches our female readers—an they need it—
How harder 'tis to quench love's fire than feed it.

XIII

Pale Cynthia, whose beams alike can tickle
Young poets into amatory rabies,
Or light from lands of Prussian *pumpernickel*
The *Helden* bombers of defenceless babies,
How super-silvern shone that night thy sickle:
How stared the crowds of uninvited gabies
At glittering guests who poured like stream in spate
To win La Cassaforti's palace-gate.

For hither came, in costliest cars and carriages,
Be-starred, be-jewelled in Solomonic glory,
All that gay world our sterner time disparages:—
Dark diplomats and politicians hoary;
Old titles, money-propped on dowered marriages;
Young fortunes, new-veneered "*commendatore*";
Ichor unsullied since the days of Dante;
Blue blood whose grandad kept a *ristorante*;

Subservient courtiers of the Quirinale;
Stolid supporters of the Vaticano;
Idlers from Europe's every *capitale*,
Subjects of *presidente* or *sovrano*;
Soft beauty, squired by sabred *uffiziale*;
Back-biting British beldames, from the Arno;
Strange *outré* Slavs, Teutonic stereotypes,
And dollared exiles from the Stars and Stripes. . . .

But stranger far than eke her strangest guest,
La Cassaforti queened it; pantherine;
A Dionysian Mænad, Poiret-dressed
In gold-shot purples of the ripened vine;
Lean as a flame. 'Neath pearl-brow, sable-tressed,
Glowed her great gorgeous eyes, fire-opaline—
Eyes that might well drive saints to pray the devil
Bless the black mass of her nocturnal revel:

(And *had*, said some. Though I beg leave to doubt them.
For they that put Dame Rumour to the touch,
Oft find that gossip's easiest conquests flout them,
While famous prudes—do not behave as such.
So, since we can't know very much about them
Until they're ours—and then not very much;
And since, once ours, we daren't betray their tryst;
Who slanders woman, owns himself unkissed) . . .

A pagan queen in her high Bakstian hall,
White lights from thousand lustres round her beating,
Milady stood—the cynosure of all:
Here gave a careless hand; there bowed a greeting.
And ne'er, I ween, since Ate's golden ball
Was beauty's prize, saw lover such a meeting
As Giulio watched, when Mayfair's maid most haughty
Returned the welcoming peck of Cassaforti.

What simile shall serve contrast that deevy
Dark Southern temptress and blonde Northland fairy?
'Twas as though Lilith (Adam's first) met Evie
Or e'er man came to grief through little Mary;
'Twas as though Lady Di. kissed Ethel Levey;
'Twas as though night pecked day; or crow, canary:
'Twas . . . But enough of similes! The picture
Near boiled my Giulio's blood to cardiac stricture.

Breathless he flew to Jill; and breathless lifted
White glove to eager lip. All breathless drew
Through the bright crowd that hither thither drifted,
To where—safe hidden from the public view—
An arrased chamber was. (For, e'er love shifted,
Right well the secrets of that house he knew,
And almost all its alcoves had he sat in—
Being, in that respect, a thorough Latin.)

* * * * *

One artful moment, passion-dumb, he stood . . .
And something in his eyes—perchance the flicker
Which warns a woman, howsoever good,
That her appeal has made our heart beat quicker—
Took Jill's mind back to far-off flapperhood,
And Bobbie's eyes, and her first kissing-dicker. . .
Till burning love-words of a different breed
Recalled her errant soul to caution's need.

For now, as bursts a dam long barricaded,
Burst Giulio's frenzy—Southern tongue to vent it;
Raved; stammered; begged; cajoled; implored; upbraided;
Swore if she'd but be his she'd ne'er repent it;
Now charged flirtation's trench, now enfiladed;
Now called her "cold," now swore he never meant it;
Now caught her hands; now flung them down in pique;
Now, kneeling, pressed furred ball-dress to his cheek.

And then: and then . . . Ah praise that imp
who gave
The shield of mirth to ward love's last ambition!
Jill laughed. And sudden, Giulio ceased to
rave;
And rising, kissed her hand; and swore contrition;
And vowed himself eternally her slave;
And vowed that, tho' he loved her to perdition,
If she'd but pardon, nevermore he'd lapse.
So, smiling, Jill forgave; and thought, "Perhaps."

And out they passed to mingle with the throng
That burbled Scandal, Politics, or Art,
That danced, or bridged, or chattered through a
song—
And talked awhile, and drifted soon apart . . .
But late next morn lay Jill; and communed long
Of this and that with her enquiring heart:
And thus her maiden meditation ran,
"My first encounter with a married man."

XIV

Which part—our last of Continental travel—
Weaves tangled skeins for moralists to unravel.

XIV

O Venice, Venice where d'Annunzio's loge is :
Bright nonsense Temple of blood-thirsty Thurston :
O horseless base of monitors and Doges :
O arched Rialto, Shylock erstwhile curst on :
O rarest colours—madders, blues, gamboges—
Of canvases art-students did their worst on :
O squares that know not Austrian or Hun drum !
O *Durchbruch's* still insoluble conundrum !

I sing thee as thou wert in merrier times
When tourists flocked—vest-kodaks in their hand-bags—
To feed the pigeons 'neath thy giants' chimes ;
And gondoliers, in gaudiest scarves and grand bags,
Reaped the rich honeymooner's frequent dimes :
Not as I saw thee last, all swathed in sandbags,
A desert darkling city—where the tight
Might well bless him who edged thy *rivas* white.

* * * * *

'Tis the last night of Easter's carnival.
Song's in the air, and mandolines are tinkling.
'Tis lovers' night! Adown the Grand Canal
Where myriad lights go bobbing, sliding, twinkling,
Floats Jill: while Beppo, pleasure's seneschal,
Stands deaf to oar, as tho' he ne'er had inkling
Why *both* his fares were so intent to choose a
Barco di lusso colla felse chiusa . . .

Float, happy pair! Nor fear we shall disclose
To Mrs. Gossip and her rambling fellow,
If your fond lips knew rapture or repose
On waterways where gondoled erst Othello.
Float! None save *stai*-shouting Beppo knows
The secret of your cabin's warm prunello.
Float! Safer e'en than they who fast with shuvver fare
Down England's lanes on some clandestine love-affair.

Float, happy pair, in undisturbèd leisure.
Scarce rocks your cradle to the dripping oar.
The gemmed night veils, drawn curtains screen your pleasure,
As waters gurgle 'neath your silvern prore.
Float! While Muse chants an echo of that measure
She heard long since beside Rapallo's shore,
When—like that other poet—her *signore*
Loved *canti, rose, forza, e amore.*

Moon, moon mine, up the starred skies creeping,
Guard my lover-boy. Kiss him sleeping.
Bring him safe from the wind and the billow,
Safe to his lover-girl's lonely pillow.

Moon, moon mine, on the far town beaming,
Guard my lover-girl. Kiss her dreaming.
Grant her peace till the red dawn's breaking
Rouse her eyes to a lonely waking.

Jill, *cara* Jill, when recollecting ears
Hark to that tune from London's hurdy-gurdy,
What pictures rise to mind? What truth appears? . . .
Dark Giulio, now clad in *grigio verde*,
If sing that song thy snow-shoed mountaineers—
To whom th' Hungarian drops as game to Purdey—
Do you recall, unsatisfied, your long quest?
Or dream, in battle, peace-time's easier conquest?

Moon, moon mine, down the paled skies creeping,
Hold him, fold him in thy safe-keeping.
Rock, rock safe on a windless billow
Barque where he dreams with his nets for pillow.

Moon, moon mine, o'er the far town setting,
Hold her, fold her in dream's forgetting.
Guard her sleeping, and guard her waking
Safe till the dawn-light's golden breaking.

Enough, enough, my Beppo! By the pence
Which once I gave thee in Kiralfy's Court,
I pray thee bend thy back, and oar me hence
This dubious craft with double meanings fraught. . . .
The far song dies to silences, immense
As Northcliffe's brain or Alighieri's thought,
Dim as the reputation of that pen is,
Which fails to sing false sentiment in Venice.

Song dies; blade dips; boat, Beppo, lovers, fade
Into that past of petticoats and pastry
When ne'er our *direttissimo* delayed
Its hurrying wheels to force us change at Mestre.
And none shall say if stealth and serenade
Plucked ripest fruit that grew on Seymour's chaste tree;
Or whether Giulio might only fondle a
Cool hand of friendship in that vanished gondola.

The puppets pass: but still their riddle stands.
Tigress or lady? Paramour or minx?
What happiest chance thus loosed convention's bands—
Rheumatic motherhood? Paternal drinks?
What went before? What after? Ask the Sands
(Who can't keep riddles); ask it of the Sphinx,
"John Bull," "The Referee," "The Evening News":
But ask it not of England's modern Muse.

For she—that wench Elizabethans knew—
Has got her to some convent, where Miss de la Mare
Brews the weak tea-leaves of a "Times" review:
And at a *real* kiss, she'd run and tell her ma.
So that no passion-scene, however true,
Now dares the page of metrical best-seller mar:
And where it fain had rioted, my festive
Quill must content itself with the suggestive.

XV

What Jill to-day would not give hat, coat, skirt—e'en
Her high-legged boots—to put clock back to 'thirteen?

XV

Now listen every true-eyed, blue-eyed maiden
(Type super-sloppiest of fiction's purity),
Whose golden tresses, nightly backward braiden,
Rest care-free in Hinde's hair-bind's puffed security;
Whose white hands daily minister, chit-laden,
To the *fine fleur* of Albion's maturity,
What time with restless Remington it keeps
Safe watch and ward o'er our inviolate deeps:

Listen all ye whom Peckham's Rye disgorges:
Suburbia's proudest; warrior damozels;
Pin-money bureaucrats, whose tea-time orgies
Shame the poor past, in commandeered hotels
Where pseudo-Geddeses and mock Lloyd Georges
Ride the high horse of indispensables:
All ye whom Stagg and Mantle clothe, whose clammy souls
Hanker for Venn's anacreontic camisoles.

I sing the London that ye never knew,
That nevermore your Lotus feet shall enter
(Poor feet who tread our grape-skins' residue):
Old London, Empire's coruscating centre,
Mart of the World; where flaunted German Jew
His peaceful diamond's free-trading *schlenter*,
And Asquith played the prophet in the beams of it,
While Haldane spoke his soul out—reams on reams of it.

'Twas a strange place that London long ago:
Cream in all teas, and facts in several papers:
There never patriots, row on premiumed row,
Dashed to buy war-bonds at the linen-drapers';
There never growled the taxi-driver, "No";
There never Simpson's mutton cut its capers;
And Chesterton might breakfast off a Porterhouse
Nor cause a panic in one Smithfield slaughterhouse:

So bright it was, that e'en its East End drab bits
Shone till a sneak-thief needed pull his cap low
To 'scape the cop's investigating habits,
Where toiled—nor thought its sweated wage a scrap low—
The pogromed horde, and multiplied like rabbits,
And never bought first seasons Aldgate—Taplow,
Nor fared, with purse whose soiléd silk packed pelf ridges,
To buy the fish of Friday's night at Selfridge's:

A wet town, and a merry: Bass and Allsopp
Unceasing flowed from those white-handled engines
Whence now scarce wrenches out one watered small sop
She who disdaineth all save *marrying* men's gins:
Blithely mote then, in night-clubs' dancing-halls, hop,
That bird whose curfewed feet our half-past-ten gins;
Unspied mote lovers seek those darkling walks
Where, Argus-eyed, our Bobby-woman stalks:

A free town, and undisciplined: no brass-hat,
Embusqué, doled its matches out in driblets;
No Zeus-like Coal-King, thundering afar, sat
In couponed majesty above its giblets;
No flag-time flapper dared its streets—to pass hat
For *Congo* refugees: in all its criblets
Was never babe—of e'en most sceptic ilk—
That trusted not its uncombinèd milk.

London, dead London, Citadel of Freedom!
Where never nuttiest præ-bellum nipper
Of Murray's Moab or the Empire's Edom
Feared for Athlumney's castigating slipper;
Where never rivalled rich Munitioneedom
The Crœsian splendours of a war-freight shipper;
Sublime Metropolis of Snobbery,
Back o'er the years my soul goes out to thee.

For I, I loved: thee all of thee; thy docksides;
Thy secret dens of Chinaman and Lascar;
Thy marts of baccy, rubber, silvern fox-hides;
Thy rents—such rents as ne'er "made envious Casca";
Thy merchant-princes, whose week-end peroxides
Hastened, safe-screened in many a Triplex-glass car,
To charm gold's worries from each finance-laden head
On Sunday morns at Brighton or at Maidenhead:

I loved thy daughters, daintiest as dowdiest;
Cadby's tea'd Halls as Fuller's soda-fountain;
Bloomsbury's quiet squares as Leicester's rowdiest;
Thy Johnian woodglades as thy Primrose mountain:
Oft wandered where thy pea-soup fog clung crowdiest;
Oft at thy Wonderland observed the count ta'en:
Yet most—like butcher prizes fleeced neck's best end—
London, I prized thy palpitating West End.

For there—as flash the dragon-flies on scummy stream
When sun of May succeeds to April's rains,
Or as to midday temples of the tummy stream
Those radiant hats that hide official brains—
New-hatched each morn on Round-Pond Fashion's rummy stream,
Glittered the caddis-wings' ephemeral veins:
While round them circled hawk-moths, bees, wasps, gutter-flies,
Humming-birds, praying mantises, and butterflies—

Tortoiseshell, peacock, admiral, black swallow-
tail
(Voted the best by schoolboys, till they find
Its wriggling pupa breeds a Front Bench hollow
tale),
Camberwell Beauty (rarest of its kind) . . .
Which now, to colour atmosphered Apollo tale,
Free'd from the killing-bottle of my mind,
Shall flutter reckless round Jill Seymour's candle
And singe their wings in quite a pretty scandal.

XVI

How Hazeline Tredither (chaste though comely)
Took tea with the great author, Garforth Chumleigh.

XVI

Muse, though thy sale eclipses "Bees in Amber,"
Though prized thy voice as Ella's passion-lilt,
Still must thy little feet in reverence clamber
These storied stairs—which Brothers Adam built,
When first arose on pier-propped archway's camber
Adelphi Terrace from the river-silt,
And those brick vaults wherein our bluest blood banks
Replaced old Durham House's coal-black mud-banks.

For here, where once—who knows?—at tea-time thundered
A broad-side from his high scholastic sponson,
While simpered Mrs. Thrale and Boswell wondered,
That brainy bigot, Dr. Samuel Johnson;
Where chancely Goldsmith pondered ere he plundered
Just one more royalty from Jacob Tonson;
Where Garrick's table feasted all the town;
Lives He whose light outshines e'en our renown.

Who knows not Garforth Chumleigh ? Can the
dearth
Of strawboard or the rise of minder's wages
Restrain his output ? Could the war-worn earth
Revolve without those thrice three hundred
pages
To which his Jovian brain gives yearly birth—
Nor even so its writing-itch assuages,
But needs must breed, such travail to appease,
A ceaseless thought-swarm, daily-journalese ?

Garforth, sublimest of our Empire's thinkers
(And each fresh thought paid cash upon the
nail) ;
Garforth, most sure of literary tinkers,
Dearer to England than lost Teddy Tail ;
Who pairest Sex with Deity (in blinkers)
To haul thy nine-bob chariot : all hail !
Long may the critics round thy treacle-tub lick,
Long may thy deft nib comfort grateful public !

Dost thou remember, brother, the beginning
Of this true tale on which—'tis said—you
based
Your epic novel, " One Short Season's Sinning :
A Drama of Society," that raced
Through twenty eagle-wayed editions, winning
E'en the approval of the straightest-laced,
Who pardoned all " Jane's " errors when you capped
her
With orange-blossoms in that final chapter ?

Well, brother, here's the scene, lest you forget . . .
'Twas a gray Spring-time afternoon; the rain
Turned to a "miracle of shining wet"
The pictured London of your window-pane,
Blurred the Tower Bridge's dim-seen silhouette,
The whisky'd Scotchman and St. Paul's domed fane,
Spurted from hasting tram-wheels, sleeked each horse
That trotted doleful way to Charing Cross.

A dismal background! But, within, the kettle
Sang cheerily at hob; the fire-light glinted
On desk and chair and Dictaphone's bright metal,
On silver tea-things and on cakes unstinted.
While there, cross-legged in your low oaken settle,
Hat thrown aside from tresses sable-tinted,
Cat-like a-purr, sprawled Stageland's chastest queen,
The ever-virgin widow, Hazeline.

Author and actress—hard it were to state
Which of ye twain took fame's most sugared biscuit.
For she was loved from Notting's mountain-gate
To the far lands of Grape-nuts, gum and Triscuit;
And whether she played "character" or "straight,"
Or deigned awhile in pantomime to frisk it,
Parts could not change nor repetition wither
That one whined note of Hazeline Tredither.

Moreover, she was pure! In vain had faint
As fondest lover pressed his ardent suit
To her rich hand. Not once had scandal's taint
Sullied that baby-brow's milk-white repute.
Pure, did I say? Nay, more than that—a saint,
A martyr, married early to a brute
Who living loved her not, and dying left
Her youth of all save innocence bereft.

Wherefore—despite her stage's own convention,
Which, finding heroine in hero's flat,
Ne'er fails impute the very worst intention—
Unchaperoned, uncompromised, she sat
To pour your tea; and, pouring, chanced to mention
(From what small tits Fates fledge their vastiest tat!)
Jill Seymour, newly met and found "too sweet,"
And next week's lunch at Upside-downing Street.

And, "Garforth, you *must* take me there," she pouted,
"You simply can't refuse *their* invitations."
(For sometimes you played Fabian, and scouted
Even the most exalted art-collations.)
"Please, Garforth *dear*," she lisped; and, lisping, routed
Your rearguard of perfunctory negations;
And laughing, "Don't you fall in love with Jill,"
Sped off to top Stoll-Moss's early bill. . . .

* * * * *

How the three crones must laugh as they entwine
Cat's-cradle-wise our mortal threadball's tangle.
Jill Seymour! Little recked you, Garforth mine,
As one by one you watched the peace-lights spangle
River and river-bank—ere, dressed to dine,
You sought the Carlton's palm-embowered quadrangle—
What cups of happiness, what cups of rue,
Fate's butler meant to mix for her and you.

XVII

Shews Jill en reine *where Art and Empire meet*
At reason's feast in Upside-downing Street.

XVII

What art thou, most mysterious human function
Which Albion's puppets miscall "Government"?
Art time and wisdom's ultimate conjunction?
Or but a hotch-potch makeshift, somehow blent
Of money-bags, intrigue and social unction—
A compromise to which we all assent
Because we're too absorbed in our own labours
To bother very much about our neighbour's?

What art thou, Westminster? A caucused lobby?
An oratorial-acrobatic stadium
Where greasy lawyers wrestle for a hobby?
Or art indeed the Common Weal's palladium—
Sure shield of liberty, all bossed and knobby,
Steel tempered with Northcliffian vanadium?
Coat of chain Mail? Safe ulster, proofed by Carson?
Or leaking brolly of exempted parson?

God and the Irish know! *I* sing the past,
The ballot-glories of pacific Plancus;
When, in the cannon's place, the vote we cast,
Polished the mace, but left unsharped the ankus;
Trusted to cobblers our Imperial last;
And kissed the alien paws that itched to spank us:
Those spacious days with silk and money blest,
For which two million sportsmen have gone West.

* * * * *

Swiftly and cloying-sweet as saccharine
In Governmental tea, a week had melted. . . .
Now, Paris-hatted, radiant in the sheen
Of Lucille lunch-frock—clinging-cut, low-belted—
Lisped at her host the Lady Hazeline;
Till quivered on her slim throat ermine-pelted,
The necklace, diamond-clasped but Tecla-pearled,
Which proved her virtue to a trusting world.

Muse, could a witness of that regal luncheon
Doubt for one instant Albion's stability?
Here Beauty smiled while Wisdom broached its puncheon;
Here Virtue shared her cutlet with Virility;
Here wielded Scholarship its classic truncheon;
Here Art plus Politics defied Futility;
Here Education, Repartee and Gravy
Insured our Army, guaranteed our Navy.

Here, with MacStubbs the elder, Corinth Tose,
Resplendent in a forty-guinea chiton,
Discoursed Greek learning: there, Harmodius Chose—
Protection's bane, Free Trade's Aristogiton—
Unbent a leisured hour to furbelows;
While yonder, Lady Lastditch of East Brighton
Strove valiantly with "*Ich bin*" and with "*Du bist*"
To entertain a dumb Hungarian Cubist.

But soon, in vain were Wit and Wisdom squandering
On one fair guest their wealth of social skill:
For ever Hazeline's sharp look went wandering
To where sat Garforth, communing with Jill;
And ever Hazeline's sharp soul kept pondering
That saw, which testifies how sillier still
Than handkerchief-mislaying Desdemona
Is she who finds her pal a second donah.

Now recollection heard those words, jest-spoken,
"Don't fall in love with her." Now eyes askance
Marked in each attitude, in their unbroken
Ripple of converse; marked in Chumleigh's glance
And Jill's too-answering smile—suspicion's token.
Yet neither lisping voice, nor countenance
Wreathed in attention, to keen host betrayed
The stab of jealousy's jade-handled blade.

But never inkling of that green-eyed dragon
Troubled my green-eyed Jill. Enthralled, she sat
(Though conscious that she'd Poiret's gladsomest rag on
And Lewis' most Monte-Carlist hat),
While—triple-fired of beauty, food and flagon
To prove unprofitable, stale and flat,
Kings, Churches, Nations, Marriage and Divorce—
Her partner prattled on from course to course.

Too swift for her the long-drawn meal-time sped.
Host, hostess, butler, guests—to pigmies dwindled
At a mere nod of that Homeric head.
Pale in the fire of those orbs genius-kindled,
Scarce green seemed *crême-de-menthe*, and port scarce red.
And: "all through life," she thought, "my soul's been swindled.
Here is the Light of Lights—whose beam outsells
Caines, Bennetts, Goulds, Cross, Garvices and Dells."

Poor Hazeline! 'Spite minor poets' puny verse
And sampler-sentiments of Smiles belauded,
Not always in our ultra-modern universe
Goes virgin virtue safely self-rewarded.
So since in this my play you spout no spoony verse,
But stalk, a secret Fury, vengeance-sworded,
Let hatred black your brows, and envy streak
With Leichner's jaundiced paint your damask cheek:

And, just for once, play part as author planned;
His cues observe; to gag or cut forbear!
Watch but that parting. Mark them, how they stand
Stage-loverlike apart—Jill's casual air
Belied by down-drooped gaze, and lingering hand,
And murmured, "Tea with us in Berkeley Square." . . .

Now, Miss Tredither, *sotto voce*, hiss:
"By Heaven, both of you shall pay for this."

XVIII

Muse—hitherto immune from all New-writis—
Suffers a short attack of Chumleigh-itis.

XVIII

Sad fact it is, that we who woo to-morrow
With classic metres and Parnassian diction
Must needs or soon or late, to Muse's sorrow,
Acknowledge "form" a damnable restriction:
Wherefore your pardon, Garforth, an I borrow
The style you've made so popular in fiction—
That specious mixture of the confidential,
The guessed, the read of, and the non-essential:

Your *dulce-est-desipere-in-loco*
Combined with magisterial severity,
Half of it yellow-back, half full Morocco;
(One eye on truth and t'other on prosperity):—
To rear, in rock embellished with rococo,
A small suburban temple for posterity,
With altars both to God and Punch-and-Judy,
And booths for Bumpus, Hatchards, Smith and Mudie:

A kind of Ilford-Bromley Shwé-Dagon,
Within whose tinselled shrines some future pundit
May tell his literary beads and drone,
"How vast *their* age; how huge the lights which sunned it";
Then, turning to his worshippers, intone:
"Gold was the spent past, present can't refund it . . .
Except, of course, my nephew, Robert Rhymes,
Whose verse I praised so much in last week's 'Times.'"

How I digress! And yet, God bless digression
Which helps so much to camouflage banality,
Is, as it were, the path of self-expression
That leads direct to sales and immortality.
But now my soul's fed-up with this confession,
Itches, in fact, to chuck aside formality,
To take you to its bosom, female reader,
And shew how Garforth fared with Fashion's leader.

For which it seems to me we must dissect,
Probe, so to speak, his temperamental core.
First as to Hazeline. Did he detect
That she was—shall we say a little *sore*?
He must have. Then there's Jill. Don't you suspect
It wasn't so much *sex* with him, but more
The fact that he felt just a trifle—flattered,
At being taken up by one who—*mattered*?

Although, of course, there *was*—no use denying it,
One sees *that* from his photograph, by Hoppé,
The steadfast forehead, roving eye belying it,
The mouth clean-cut, but the moustaches floppy—
Apart from Jill's attractiveness, outvieing it,
Her *newness*: authorhood in search of "copy,"
Ready to take advantage of the *whim*
Her ladyship displayed regarding him.

So much for Garforth. Now for Jill. Consider
The kind she was, as skilful in attack
As in defence; essentially a—*kidder*.
To use a simile: no Hyde Park hack
Sold at the Season's close to highest bidder,
But one who'd bucked more jockeys from her back
And sent them limping home with soiled and sandy cap,
Than any filly in the Maiden Handicap.

Then why? Adventure? Difficult to tell.
No doubt she *was* impressed by notoriety,
Which, as we know, will sometimes prove the spell
To tempt a girl from pathways of propriety;
Perhaps a little curious; bored as well
With the eternal treadmill of "Society,"
And later—this I'm sure of—fairly zealous
To make "that cat Tredither" still more jealous.

And there, in best Garforthian, you've the three
of them . . .
I like to think of him, the little fellow,
Trousers by Scholte (creases down each knee of
them),
Scott-hatted, gloves sulphureously yellow,
Two girls in mind and wondering which he'll see
of them :
A sort of twentieth-century Sordello
Singing, " I'm gay, and life's a fearful lark,"
On jolly peace-time mornings in the Park.

I like to think of Jill : Kingfisher flashing
Electrically through that London season,
Now to the play, now to the races dashing,
Always fresh dinners, suppers, lunches, teas on ;
Money and fizz like water round her splashing,
Spending like mad, week-ending without reason;
And ever—cock-bird preening in the hen-dance—
Garforth, to rag-time, hopping his attendance.

Also, I like to think of the Tredither,
Victim of admiration grown capricious,
The wee'st mite surprised, her baby-blither
A note or so *too* high, a bit—malicious ;
Now taxi-driven hither and now thither
To spread her tale, half truth and half fictitious :
Reluctant gossiper, the saintly highbrow
With deprecating hands and lifted eyebrow. . . .

But most of all it bucks me up to think
That when my spirit shineth as a star forth
In realms where—bluer-black than Stephen's Ink—
Satan drives wailing bards from Pluto's bar forth,
Pundits on earth will rack their brains to link
Some long-dead modern novelist with "Garforth,"
And, racking, fail, as pundits do, to spot
If Chumleigh be one modern—or the lot.

XIX

Resumes in shrillest Frankauesque—con brio—
The Jill—Tredither—Garforth-Chumleigh trio.

XIX

Lord of the Northern Sea! Elusive merman,
Not Vanoc's self can blow to oil and glory:
Magnate of gold-trusts never dreamed by Sherman:
Splendour of Liberal and pride of Tory:
All Highest and most Natural Anglo-German:
Quaintest of characters in Albion's story:
Proteus more variform than pickled Heinz:
May Harris guard thine house, Sir Samuel Mainz!

Splendid it gleamed that night—a blazing palace
Of all that wealth can contribute to pleasure;
A very Wonderland, where many an Alice
Gasped as she eyed each Duveen-invoiced treasure.
Crimson, the orchids flaunted; gold, the chalice
Bubbled with Pommery's unstinted measure:
Loud, shrieked each colour-scheme's expensive chromo;
Loudly announced each guest, the Major Domo.

Constant, they came: half London: here a court dress;
Kensington there, in middle-aged tiaras;
Art in trailed silks, and stage in latest short dress;
Brief season-folk from county Connemaras;
Hack Fleet Street, anxious only to report dress;
Tostis unsung and embryo de Laras:—
For never money-bee yet gave "Reception"
But straightway thousand drone-wings round the skep shone.

High-poised where florist Solomon had made—
Wreathing in arum-blooms and maidenhair
Gilt colonettes of onyx balustrade—
A screened gazebo for flirtatious fair;
Pensive in cloth-of-gold, my Jill surveyed
The jostling pageantry of hall and stair:
To whom appeared, fresh-crowned with legal laurels,
That arbiter of matrimonial morals,

Lord Reggie Strar. In happiest mood he came,
New-steered of Poole to absolute's fair haven;
Once more released to lavish wealth and name
On head or blonde or sorrel-top or raven,
Which best might please; rose, red as Hymen's flame,
Blazing at button-hole; of Douglas shaven;
Silk-socked; bright-monocled; gallant; no trace
Of Bluebeard wrinkle on his handsome face.

Friends had they been, these twain, since first they cantered
Together, Shetland-horsed, the Ladies' Mile;
Long ere her pinless curls were tam-o'-shantered,
Long ere his first petition graced the file.
And still as friend she met him—lips that bantered,
Cheeks dimpled, hand-clasp steady, eyes a-smile;
Intrigued to probe that heart; alike perplexed
To name its last or prophesy its next.

Careless they greeted; careless watched the throng
That swirled and whirled and bunched and broke below:
Talking the while. "Some picnic. Been here long?"
"Isn't it *awful?* Half-an-hour or so.
How's marriage, Reg.?" . . . "How's authors? Going strong,
I hear." . . . "Who told you?" . . . "Bothered if I know
Who put the tale about, or where I struck it,
But take my tip, old thing—you'd better chuck it."

"But why?" laughed Jill. Though something in his tone,
Some note beneath that jocular inflection,
Seemed real warning. "Reasons of my own.
There's one." His hand, half-pointing, gave direction
To where stood Hazeline—sweet bud scarce-blown,
Grease-paint fresh-creamed from her divine complexion.
"What? That!" Jill laughed once more.
"The poor Tredither."
"No," came the answer, "but the chap who's with her."

* * * * *

Downwards peered Jill; and saw the sleek dark napper,
Shirt-front black-pearled, winged waistcoat, braided trousers,
(Perfect each detail, yet the whole *too* dapper),
Of him who weekly chronicles which spouse errs
And whether lone hub. frisketh with some flapper
Where Grafton's bachelors defy the wowsers—
Of that stern press-man, Montmorency Brown,
Whose "Gossip Mail" records the sins of Town....

Ah me! Had you but hearkened then, my Jill girl,
Renounced your goddess-right to flirt with mortals,
Fled the galled ink-drops of that gutter quill, girl,
Lightened no more those Anglo-German portals,—
Never had gaping shop-boy, frolic mill-girl
Leered at your photograph; nor Clubland's chortles,
Bitter as dry Martinis, linked your name
With those who played the Saturnalian game!

Had you but guessed. . . . But Fate, she sits apart,
Veiled from the eyes of us her actions tutor.
And yours was aye a democratic heart,
Reckless that gold-spoon may not stoop to pewter,
Seymours to Mainzs, fashion-plates to Art,
Blue-blooded miss to literary suitor.
"Chuck it," urged Reggie, "that chap's dangerous,
And Haze Tredither's hardly one of us."

But you, you only tossed capricious head,
And turned to quiz a newly-entered dress
Of artiest green, key-scrolled with artiest red:
"Caution," you called it, "signalling distress."
"An omen, Jill?" he answered. Then you said:
"Calm yourself, Reggie, *Garforth's on the press.*" . . .
And loud above Sir Samuel Mainz's revels,
Guffawed a million mocking printer's devils.

XX

Thickens the plot—and, thickening, discovers
A garden rendezvous for London lovers.

XX

Sweet Viscount Bryce, and Ye, most noble Peers,
Shoguns self-doomed to splendid dissolution,
Who erstwhile set Welsh war-dogs by the ears—
Stirring to wrath the founts of elocution
On thousand hustings, where electioneers
Howled you a danger to the Constitution—
Stern mitred prelates; Law-lords; back-woods Samurais
Who flung to Consequence a scornful "Damn your eyes":

One boon your bardling craves! When rises gleaming,
Rebuilt from topmost tile to lowest sewer,
That Second Chamber of your Lordships' dreaming,
Where—freed from party-pledge and boodled brewer,
Free-conferenced for Albion's redeeming,—
Financeless rule the Few-elected Fewer;
Let never builders' rubble desecrate
Those river-gardens of your ancient state.

For there—ah me, my Lords, how long ago,
"Ten years of years" it seems—a Garforth waited
The favourite of his seraglio,
His lady so beloved and so belated;
There anxious watched; and, pacing to and fro,
Much with his too enquiring mind debated:
Pinning to setting board of dull psychology
The wiftiest wings of Fashion's entomology.

And thus he thought: "This place of her suggesting:
This afternoon appointment, so romantic:
That letter, half command and half requesting:
What do they signify? Caprice? An antic?
Or something deeper? Doth her coy protesting
Denote anæmic heart or passion-frantic?
Have I, in fact, *a chance*?" . . . Here closed debate,
As fussed Jill's taxi to the entrance-gate.

Jar of a brake. Pen-hand at stubborn catch.
Bang of closed door. A swift deliberation:
Then, "Wait". Lace-frocked; spread parasol to match;
Straw toque, tip-tilted, trimmed with one carnation;
'Twixt tea and tea the Goddess stooped to snatch
Her little hour of clandestine flirtation.
"Poor man! I'm late. As usual." But he:
"Tell me, dear lady, why this secrecy?"

" Because, *cher maître*, we never meet alone."
That look, I ween, jade-eyed and roguish-comely,
That tilted toque, that quavered semitone
Which ravished all the soul of Garforth Chumleigh,
Had melted e'en the heart of triple stone
In him who eyed his metre's face so glumly,
Pondering tuppences, the while they came
Down gravelled pathways to the bankèd Thame.

Elbows on balustrade; below, the tideway,
Endless as Life, unhurried, eddying past;
Westward and east the river's sunlit wide way;
Southward, gray skies with smoke-pall overcast;
Behind them, Mrs. Grundy's tiresome tried way;
In front, the path of Love-that-may-not-last;
Children the years had treated all too kindly,
Whither the bored God led, they followed blindly.

Where never gorse-bush tears a lady's kirtles,
Where poets' hats are broadest-brimmed and floppy,
Where the fount " Sentiment " perennial spurtles
On weedless turf its dewdrops sweetly-soppy;
Master and maid, they sought among love's myrtles—
She for sex only, he for sex and " copy "—
A tiny summer-house of mixed morality
To screen them from the scorching sun, Reality.

Whence looking forth, they visioned, florist-splendid,
One great glad miracle of hot-house weather,
The park-lawns of that Season almost ended;
Bosky with arbours where they'd sat together;
Bright with all costliest blossoms, smilax-blended,
With tuberose and palm-tree's tufted feather;
Gay with a thousand supper-boards, whose drink
Was poured to rag-time tunes by Herman Finck. . . .

And there, what time they lingered, memorising
Each bygone beauty of that London landscape;
What time his fingers, newly enterprising,
Found and ne'er let her unresisting hand scape;
Jill broached the rendezvous of her devising—
No Brighton-roaded dangerously-planned scape,
But just a hint that Garforth, "as things stood," would
Be asked to stay with "Sammy Mainz" for Goodwood.

Only a hint! Small nymphs vouchsafe to men
More than such inkling of their love-plea's fate
Only a hint! And ah, when booming Ben
Warned it was time and time to separate;
When, lonely by the river once again,
Garforth with anxious Garforth held debate;
How puzzled pen-and-ink psychologist
To solve the portent of that racing-tryst.

But who shall sound with Venus-leaded line
The heart of Jill—those passion-dangered shallows,
Here concrete hard as bed of Serpentine,
There softer sand than Barbellion marshmallows?
Who dares, with rod of Waterman, divine
If gushed her thoughts to bride-ring and All Hallows,
Or whether five-bob tip to taxi-cabby
Presaged the sorting-bells of Hell Fire Abbey?

XXI

Now on each moaning breast let Georgette stitches stir
In sorrow for lost Godinwood-by-Chichester.

XXI

Weep for the King of Sports, the Sport of Kings ;
  Weep for the Douglases that owe no more!
Fallen are all the gods of Certain Things,
  Beaten the dead-sure favourites of yore,
Silent the golden and the silver rings,
  Silent the tic-tac's tell-tale semaphore :
On thousand tracks, unridden, desolate,
Hay waves from winning-post to starting-gate.

Aye! on the very turf of our old gods
  (Weep for a shrunken Ruff, a tipless tout),
Where once ten thousand bookies brayed their odds
  And myriad pencils plied 'twixt shout and shout,
Mournful the scarlet-runner droops its pods,
  Mournful and slow up-spires the Belgian sprout,
While at these rails which Archer hugged, and Loates,
Stand but the ears of Protheronian oats.

The gods, the gods are smitten. Scarce remains
Of million worshippers their altars knew,
Of all who thronged their grassy paddock-fanes,
A vouchered and a melancholious few,
Where—screened from Stanley's vision—wait the trains . . .
O gallant band, O faithful pilgrim-crew,
To whom Newmarket's lunch-room only caters
Lest gun-teams fail for lack of selling-platers :

Altruists all! Let war-mad press-gangs mutter :
Let Hannen Swaffer toss three-column cabers,
Heed not the strictures his Dispatches utter :
An Army Council sanctifies your labours,
And future subs., on chargers fat as butter,
Shall bless you when they draw parade-blunt sabres,
Because you braved the calumnies of cant
For Ladbroke's lady and no-limit Gant.

And when, come Michaelmas, you pass from Tat's
To Pluto-Proserpine's Cimmerian "tote,"
Nor Rapier's ghost, nor Coe's, nor ghoulish Nat's
Shall pluck you by the Zeiss-glassed morning-coat ;
But Hastings' self, all glorious with spats,
Punt you in Charon's special ferry-boat
By many a Stygian fizz-and-oyster cove
To some sub-terrane Goodwood's Birdless Grove. . . .

Thrice-glorious Goodwood : though thy star has
set
Till Mayfair's war-brides sue for peace divorces,
Can Garforth Chumleigh, can his Jill forget
Thine upland paradise of garden-courses ?
Dream of a dream, its memory haunts them yet :
Green swards, dark trees, white rails and flashing
horses ;
The Trundle's cone a-shimmer in the sun ;
Lord Annandale at twenty-five to one ;

Stands, motors, tents, a-flower with silks and laces
Of careful saint or newly-whitewashed sinner ;
The Royal box ; the friendly racing-faces—
Bibulous peer and hooked-nosed money-
spinner ;
Groomed fliers shewing off their paddock-paces ;
Black Jester striding home an easy winner :—
The last best loving-cup our Season brims
For sleek Yahoos and sleeker Houyhnhnms.

That was their day of days, their *béguin's* prime :
Phœbus with Fashion, Luck with Love com-
bining—
As octave's metre matches octave's rhyme,
Or Valenciennes its *charmeuse* under-lining—
Beneath blue sky-vaults of midsummer-time,
For one too-gorgeous afternoon's enshrining.
And strange it is to think love's piping played
So gay to mistress and so sad to maid.

For scarce a score of Rolls-Royced miles away,
Where Castle Mainz looks westward to the Mardens,
Where Mainz's German-silver fountains spray
The lake that hides his submarine cigar-dens,
Where Mainz's henchmen labour night and day
To prink, perfume, and manicure his gardens—
Miss Parker sat: and never cell seemed darker
To "Dora's" prey, than Castle Mainz to Parker.

Silent as suburbs in Selfridgian rest-room,
Dumb as the glass she watched her homely face in,
Not all the splendours of The Turret's best room,
Not e'en the silver-mounted onyx basin
Which Willett had decreed for every guest-room
("Handy" hers seemed "for washing gloves or lace in"),
Nor Mapled bed nor bath of marbled pride,
Solaced her soul for "social suicide." . . .

Garforth's, that phrasing—but the thought her own.
No more, no less, she deemed her lady's visit
To halls where dollars for Debrett atone,
And gold-foiled bottles never-ending fizz it.
"No place for *us* to stay at—not *alone*—
Is it?" she sniffed. And Echo sniffed back "Is it?"
As Clara Parker, shaking thoughtful head,
Laid Lucille's latest dance-frock on the bed.

"Too good by half for such a place as this is,"
She reckoned the 'creation,' nouveau-arty,
Of that barred citadel whose mincing misses
Persuade the chaste to emulate the tarty
In satins temperamental as a kiss is.
And, "What a house!" she thought; and
"What a party!"
When up the drive she heard the homing hum of it,
"I don't believe that any good will come of it."

XXII

On with the dance—we've cocktailed, dined and wined—
Let rag-time reign and joy be unrefined.

XXII

To-NIGHT's the night! To-night the Castle blazes
Lamp-lit from purse-proud lake to flaunting flagstaff.
To-night the tom-tom's syncopation crazes,
And Dionysus waves his gladdest rag staff.
Lulu is here to lead the Maxixe mazes:
Lulu is here, and so is Nikko Wagstaff.
(One hundred pounds, the fee for which they come:
Clink the triangle, pound the big bass drum!)

Blithely but lithely, swinging, swaying, scurrying,
Fool-like yet cool-like, up the room and down again,
Proudly, while loudly 'cellos squeaky worrying
Yelps at the brass—the brass the loud drums drown again,
Hopping unstopping, hurrying unflurrying,
(Ten fivers each when once they get to town again),
Gloved hand at waistband, gloveless hand at shoulder,
Bold as their limbs are, looks are even bolder.

Never mind your curls, girls, quit your seats and
follow them.
Lift, lift the skirt (tho' Heaven knows it's short
enough).
Cling, cling with fingerling, bend your backs and
hollow them,
Nothing matters much if shoulder-straps are
taut enough.
Quit smoke you men-folk, come and grip each
doll o' them,
You've drunk Martinis, Pommery and port
enough.
Thump, thump, the tune goes: never Greek was
grander
(Who cares for Greeks?) than Jazz-time Alexander.

What's the use of metres, dactyls and iambics!
Damn, damn the Muses! Dam the fount
Parnassian!
Sing, sing, O bardling, dotty dithyrambics,
Sing to us of Ciro's silliest Circassian
Nibbling, twixt tangoes, macaroons and jam bics.
She's the true Venus, fizz-foam-born, thalas-
sian.
Paddington to Maidenhead is far enough for
Odysseys.
Great are our Dianas of the low-neck bodices.

Octave's feet outstripping, faster still and faster,
Trot now the pairs on Sammy's topping dance-floors;
Stiff collars wilt 'neath arms of alabaster,
Silk stockings hole as twinkling tootsies prance floors;
Hard is the Maxixe, hard its hop to master,
Some simply one-step, some the stumble's chance floors:
But still unwearied, dancing for their fortunes,
Lulu and Nikko urge the band to more tunes....

* * * * *

Muse mine, a truce to rags! The hour approaches,
Heavy with Fate, on leaden feet and drear,
Black as craped mutes that ride on mourning-coaches,
Bitter as dregs of D'Abernonian beer.
Already Scandal, bungward-bending, broaches
A fearful cask for Garforth's golden feere:
Soon shall Jill Seymour rue those icèd pints
She drained so gleefully in Castle Mainz.

'Tis midnight's hour, and past. Sir Samuel stands,
Lone by a rose-enwreathèd marble pillar—
Diamonds agleam on both his pudgy hands;
Between thick lips, an unlit Villar-Villar.
Not for his feet, those ramping sarabands,
Those steps of Monkman and of Gertrude Millar:
Not for the careworn soul whose cheque-book pays,
Those super-syncopated roundelays.

Lonely, he stands—a host from guests apart.
Though Banks are his, and Boats, and Bonds of Morgan,
Treasures of Waring's and of Gillow's art,
And brass beyond all brasseys forged by Forgan;
Ambition beaks that Anglo-German heart,
Gnaws like a vulture at his psychic organ—
For who, midst all those spongers on his bounty,
Save only Jill, is absolutely "county"?

Courage, most noble Samuel! Even now
That Hidden Hand which guards true British Germans,
That Hand before whose Thumb the Cave-men bow,
Whose oiled Palm guides the submarining mermans,
Whose Fingers, Potsdam-tentacled, allow
No barby fence to scratch West Hampstead's Herrmanns,
That Hand which grabs Meats, Sweets, and Margarine,
Brings you a duchess in a bust machine.

Falters, e'en now, the Stuttgart-built Mercédès;
Trembles and fails the traitor Bosch magneto;
E'en now your Eastward lodge-bell rings like Hades . . .
And, gay as flapper drawn by Fish or Peto,
Chance brings that haughtiest of neighbour-ladies,
She to whom Council kids their latest treat owe:
Her Grace of Saville,—daring social barrage
To claim the succour of your pitted garage.

And with her comes—(now thank the god, Technique,
His priestess Unger and his priest Pinero,
By whose decree—tho' thin pit wail in pique
And Keith Prowse bookings dwindle down to zero—
Of Jay released, our villainess must seek
These halls where revel heroine and hero).—
Cloaked for the part, red motor-veil on black tress,
Britain's most chaste and charitable actress.

Up then and meet them, Samuel. Banish care:
Let livered pies no longer Strassburg-boxed rot:
For these, and sturgeon's roe, and vintage rare,
Bid footman's calves and butler's silken socks trot:
And while your myrmidons the feast prepare—
Lest shock their Graces Lulu's legful fox-trot—
Lead on, MacMainz, to Castle Mainz's glory,
Your famed subaqueous conservatory!

XXIII

Here twangs romance her best Garforthian harp,
Where duck with drake disports—and carp with carp.

XXIII

Satiric Love, half angel and half devil,
Divine Week-Ender of the unstopped car,
Whose sycophants hold amatory revel
At sunset-hour across the groaning bar,
Whose henna tints, whose pallid hands dishevel
The maiden's tress from Cork to Shalimar!
Say Love (if Love thou art) was e'er thy kiss
Printed in place as curious as this?

Full fathom deep below the misty lake,
A concrete miracle, the smoke-room lies.
Coils as its weedy base the water-snake;
Over its roof the rudder-beetle plies,
Lazes the golden carp, or feeds the drake
Wagging his scornful stern at Mainzian skies;
Green-refluent above its glazen gables
The water-lily twines her anchor-cables.

Secret it lies, a very wizard-cave ;
To which, as in a trance, the charmed foot passes
By sunken lawn, by soap-stone architrave
Screened of shaped yews and tufty pampas-grasses,
Down crystal corridors, a-slant the wave
Into vague depths that blurr the lead-light glasses :
A cave of water-silence, dim-illumed,
Sprayed of cool fountlets, odorous-perfumed.

Here, on rich praying-mats from Turkestan,
Are Burman shrines of teak and tinsel-gold ;
Here woos to dreaming many a deep divan,
Chiselled from Jordan cedars, pearl-inscrolled
With runèd wisdom of Mahmoud's Koran ;
Here are strange tortured fir-trees, dwarfed and old ;
With Buddhas, manufactured in Osaka
To please the *clientèle* of Yamanaka :

Here stand all-mannered bowls of flawless glaze—
Flame-yellows, turkiss-blues, and emerald-greens ;
And scarlets, cloisonné with cherry-sprays ;
Here 'twixt glass-pictured Pekin palace-scenes
Hang lamps of silvern filigree, whose rays
Refract from Canton's ebon-lacquered screens
Whereon the stork outstretches aureate bill . . .
And here, of course, is Chumleigh with his Jill.

Pillowed on purple silks that but enhance
The bosom's satin-white, the cheeks' faint roses,
And gold of hair disordered from the dance;
Draped in some gauziest *crêpe* whose sheen discloses
Each wanton curve's scarce-veiled significance;
Couched at slim length, the languid fair reposes:
While (blush that I should write it!) Garforth sips
The honeyed fragrance from those parted lips.

And, "Dear," he murmurs, "dearest! How can I,
I so unworthy, thank your love aright.
Words—what are human words! Until it die
My *soul* shall keep the memory of to-night."
And, "O my dear, my dear," her lips reply . . .
And once again the world fades from their sight;
Once more bold glance meets love-look over-tender,
Till pale head droops in passionate surrender. . . .

But hark, what sound was that! Who dares invade
With impious pump these realms to Cupid sacred?
What careless reveller, what roystering maid
Comes where nor cherry stains the Gunter cake red,
Nor cocktails are, nor even lemonade? . . .
"Garforth!" gasps Jill; and blushes crimson-lake red,
As clicks a distant switch, as clangs a sorry door,
As echo voices down the crystal corridor.

Time, and just time, to break from close caresses :
Time, and scarce time, to cant the tie in fear !
Time, hardly time, to pat *décoiffé* tresses :
Time—is there time ?—to straighten sofa-gear,
To smooth that daintiest of dancing-dresses . . .
Time, and no more : the enemy is here !
Now, at their dug-out's mouth, they hear the blither
" How exquisite " of—Hazeline Tredither ;

(*Hazeline ! Here ! !* pants Garforth's quivering heart) ;
And Sammy Mainz's guttural voice explaining
The auction-wiles of Bond-street bodhisât,
The cost of concrete and Artesian draining :
While now the peacock curtains swish apart ;
And now—like schoolboys prescient of caning—
Rises my guilty lover-pair to face
The levelled lorgnette of her quizzing Grace. . . .

Alas, this England and its ducal manners !
Alas, these prisoners in iron masks
Steel-faced, lock-bolted with convention's spanners !
Alas, a truthful poet's thankless tasks !
Alas, my satire's hooded gauntlet-lanners ;
These sacrifices Realism asks !
Alas, a Muse that chops with blunted rhyme-axe
In tangled forests of an anti-climax !

For here, though Mistress Melodrama woos
With outstretched arms to anapæstic ructions,
Truth sees no more than hand-clasped how-de-doos
And social smiles and easy introductions. . . .
Yet 'ware, sweet maid, Tredither's bills and coos,
'Ware that false mouth's effusive parting-suctions:
Blacker than Austrian Kohinoor's plumbago
Is the black heart of that demure virago!

XXIV

For woman—as for politician—scorned,
Finest of weapons is a Press suborned.

XXIV

At Castle Mainz the xylophone is dumb :
In empty halls no more the dance-tune dizzies.
No nigger thumps an Alexandrine drum
Where, lone at butler's lip, the Clicquot fizzes.
For vanished guests, or motors Aix-ward thrum,
Or straight to butt the driven grouse-bird whizzes,
Or sparkles summer sun 'gainst clipper-bows
That cut the waves of Kiel-infested Cowes.

In Garforth's garden by the bounding sea,
Mournful the dawn-breeze through the darkling pine hums.
Sadly the slow day breaks to misery
On withered hollyhocks and antirrhinums.
"Jill!" cries a lover's heart, "come back to me" . . .
Till stern resolve that heart's despairing cry numbs,
And once again to publisher's scenario
Bows his Homeric head a lorn Lothario.

For passions pass ; religions, Empires fade,
Faster than flowers whence honey-bees drain
free cups ;
Oblivion rusts the breech-block as the blade ;
The nettle seeds where Attila had hiccups :
But still the penman plies his endless trade,
Still brew the storms in literary tea-cups ;
Time's vengeful scythe is impotent to slaughter
Heads doomed immortal by a clement Shorter.

And still revenge is jocund to the jilted . . .
In Berkeley Square no Seymour flunkeys strut ;
Drawn are those blinds, those window-boxes
wilted ;
And—where the trim maids nibbled undercut—
In bombazine and bustle Belcher-tilted,
Banquets on bloaters some care-taking slut.
Then why, ah why, my Montmorency Brown,
Is Haze Tredither still in London Town ?

Why sit ye twain in yon Gambrinus-cloister,
Where spying Teutons tipple Pilsen toddy
Till beards wax moist and eyes wax even moister ?
What bodes this midnight *sauerkraut* of Oddy ?
What secret-scoopèd pearl of Fleet Street oyster
Traffics her Slyness with your Busy-body ?
What plotted vengeance sets her eyes aglow ? . . .
Soon, and too soon, shall press-ruled England know !

* * * * *

Isaacs and Inkpots! Hobhouse, Hell and Headlines!
Who in all Albion on that fateful day
Bit not at "Gossip Mail's" be-postered leadlines,
Left not his office-work, his tennis-play,
To read black Montmorency's slander-red lines?
What clerk from Golder's Green to Mary's Cray
Voiced not his envious and his awe-struck "Damme"
At "Little Birds and Saturnalia Sammy"?

Bookstalls and Brimstone! Bigamy, Blood and Billing!
What page dare print that article of articles?
Shall Tatler take the party-stockinged shilling
To pelt pure souls with sloppy cocoa-particles?
Shall Muses condescend to gutter-trilling;
Or Pegasus, whose tail the strap-hitched star tickles,
Feed like a cow-hocked yellow Rosinante
In Grecian mangers of a Vigilante?

Ah no! Ah no! Ah, no by God and Garvin!
Torture us an ye will, reviewer-hosts:
Leave us nor pot to dip, nor cot to starve in:
Burn us to death at Repingtonian posts:
Exile our souls to some cheap Jugo-Slav inn
Where Wellsian Angells rule the bloodless roasts:
Let criticism's greenest empyema
Attack the lungs of our *ottava rima*:—

And still we will not speak! Not C.M.G.'s
That flit—like will-o'-wisps o'er eddying Marshes—
Before the eyes of mess-proud A.D.C.'s;
Not Drughorn's millions; not the spoils of Tarshish,
Not indiscreetest soldiering M.P.'s,
Shall tempt through barrier of our moustaches
More than a bowdlerised two-stanza summary
Of that eight-columned contumacious flummery.

Barefaced it was: a Machiavellian medley
Of truth and fiction; mischievous as Maurice;
Bitter as Georgic penned by patriot Hedley;
Terser than Wullie stellenbosching 'Orace:
A satire, disingenuous as deadly,
Wherein while "Sammy bunny-hugged with Doris"
"A famous novelist slunk off to spend
Some blissful moments with his lady friend."

And: "Wouldn't Sammy's pals in Angel Court,
For whom he keeps the special grocer-whisky,
Have liked to taste that '57-port?"
And: "Didn't Sammy think it pretty risky"
To be a "bull" of dancing-skirts as "short"
As those disported by the "frail and frisky"
Who loved their "little Stock Exchange adviser"
About as much as "Deutschland loves its Kaiser"...

Libels and Lewis! Damage, Death and Darling!
Help for an outraged German millionaire!
Muzzles, me lud, to stop this hell-dog's snarling!
Vengeance, ye twelve most absolutely fair!
Devils to work! Smoke on ye pipes of Barling,
What time your puffers plea on plea prepare!
From bench to box clear England's Bar for action—
A plutocrat seeks legal satisfaction!

XXV

Muse imitates her novelistic betters
By filling up an awkward gap with letters.

XXV

Help for a stranded literary skipper,
Help for a starveling crew of puppet-souls!
Off Libel Bank, beloved by legal kipper,
A cable's length from Boredom's unread shoals,
Becalmed she lies—my strawboard pirate-clipper.
Slackly her canvas droops from crowded poles;
Where naught save flats of Doldrum-tedium shine
Sticky as treacle round her plotless Line.

Saleless and local-colourless, the deep
Prisons her hull. Inaction's fell sargasso
Mats the wide wastes whereon reviewers sleep,
Claws at her royalties with greedy lasso.
No dialogue can mark the pace we creep;
No compass bright with psychologic Brasso
Avails to point the dull green-mirrored track,
(Duller than Walpole's) that our bow must tack.

Vain on these waves might Masefield's fish-fag lemans
Labour with bloodstained hands the bloodstained oar,
And shock with bloodstained oaths the ghost of Hemans,
Yet draw no nearer to the bloodstained shore;
Here neither Touchstone's Muse nor suburb Seaman's
Can salve a cargo from the dreaded bore:
One breeze and one alone for which pens whistle
Can help us now—the novelist's Epistle!

* * * * *

Come then, thou barmiest blast of postal pence,
Subtle as Blackwood, tenuous as skilly:
Unnatural zephyr, blowing Wells-knows-whence,
Wafting us Dell-knows-whither, willy-nilly:
Wind of High Art, unchilled by common sense:
Rosemary Wind of Telegraphic Billy:
Come on the catspaws of thy parted passion,
Puff me mine epic to the current fashion!

Garforth to Lady Jill. At daybreak-gleam.
Mossmelrose Cottage. Twenty-first September.
"Sweet ladye mine, How far away they seem,
Those days your lover scarcely dares remember,
Those days when you and I . . . Ah! foolish dream:
Youth's flame too bright for my poor senile ember:
Ah! roses of all dead loves, falsely-true,
Reborn to perfect roseleafhood in you.

" ' Forget,' you write, ' forget. *La vie est vaine*,
Un peu d'amour et puis—you know the rest.'
Forget! Would God, dear Ladye of Disdain,
I *could* forget those hands these hands have pressed,
Our too brief rapture, this too-endless pain;
Forget the love your love-lips once confessed
And all the glory of your tender eyes . . .
Alas, alas that passion's rose-bud dies!

" And are there roses in your Deauville too?
Great scarlet roses, salt-kissed of the sea?
Does the same day break red for me and you,
The same sun set in gold for you and me?
Wonderful, truly! Wonderfully true!
Yet ah! my rose, my rueful Rosemary." . . .
But here, alas, veracious Muse discloses
Jill murmured, " Silly rotter with his roses ";

And yawned; and skipped a dozen priceless pages
Of best Garforthian amatory patter—
Yearnings, remorses, sentimental rages
All tangled up with egoistic chatter;
And thought, " Poor G. I wonder what his age is ":
And turned, and found upon the bedside platter,
Propped between chocolate-pot and buttered toast,
Lord Reggie's contribution to her post.

Strar Castle, Strarton, Strarshire. Thursday Night.

"Dear Jill, About this rotten 'Gossip Mail.'
From what one hears, it seems Brown means to fight,
Says he's got evidence to prove his tale.
Of course he'll lose. And serve him damn well right.
Confound the chap. Why isn't he in gaol?
Did you see last week's number, 'Social Jinks:
Or, Forty-seven Manx Cats and a Minx'?

"I must admit it made me laugh like sin . . .
Old girl, I wish you'd taken my advice.
Still, Poole assures me Brown can't drag *you* in,
The Judge won't let him, not at any price.
He thinks Brown's bluffing, hasn't got the tin
To pay his counsel-fees: I've seen him twice—
Friend Poole, I mean, not Brown—about some bally money
Poor Sophie swears I owe her on the alimony.

"I kicked like steam, but paid up in the end.
She's in the wrong—but what's the use of squabbling?
And what's the use of cash, except to spend?
Though goodness knows, with *three* of 'em all gobbling,
And Daimler's cutting down their dividend,
The family fortune's positively wabbling.
However, dad's still got a tidy bit.
Ta-ta, old thing. Don't worry, and keep fit."

* * * * *

Breeze of all breezes, breeze of all my eye,
A poet's thanks for this divine assistance!
Once more, from flying-jib to mizzen-sky
Our toggled canvas bellies down the distance;
And as Muse kneels with ink-stained palms raised high,
Her white knees bent to thee in suppliant's kiss-stance,
Bright o'er the ploughed flats of the Long Vacation,
Beckons the Temple bar of litigation.

XXVI

Let her who thinks law's process dry as dust is,
Mark well these cantos of poetic justice.

XXVI

KING's Bench Division. Justice Agag's Court.
Mainz *versus* Monty Brown and "Gossip Mail."
Plaintiff alleges actionable tort—
Viz., that defendants did expose for sale,
Sell, try to sell, and offer to be bought,
Publish to wit, a certain slanderous tale,
By, from, and on account of which, and whence,
Plaintiff has suffered pain and loss of pence.

Whereto defendants plead in their defences:
There was no publication. We deny it.
And if there was, no reader in his senses
Believed the plaintiff was referred to by it.
But if he was, and if his loss in pence is
As claimed by him; we've cause to justify it;
In that, said tale by plaintiff's deed and act
Is, and was, true in substance and in fact.

* * * * *

How brief, how drab those words. Yet, oh! how gay
The gallant company they brought together.
Never I ween, since that most fatal day
When first Justinian wove our legal tether,
Saw usher's eyes so gorgeous an array
Of *charmeuse* velvet and of ostrich feather;
Never since Halsbury first drew judge's salary,
Was such a run on places in the gallery.

And in the well, what jostling of K.C.'s,
Witnesses, public, jurymen, solicitors!
What notebooks, what Exhibits A's and B's,
What musty calf-bound volumes piled in dizzy tors!
What hum of bigwig-whispered mysteries!
What comings and what goings of what visitors!
What atmosphere—as Reggie said to Jill,
"Enough to make a bally polecat ill."

Gay dog, yet never dog in Cupid's manger;
In friendship true, though false to marriage-vow;
Pal in smooth waters, more than pal in danger;
Cautioner once, concerned companion now;
Watching, he thought: "Time doesn't seem to change her.
Nervous? Not she! Jill always loved a row.
Wish that I hadn't brought her. Wish to God,
This Court could send the bounders both to quod."

But here hushed silence broke on Reggie's musing.
Rustled each silk; uprose each costly wig.
Red-robed, refreshed from "Daily Mail's" perusing,
Dry-witted as the desiccated fig,
Entered to try this case of his own choosing,
He, the pastmaster of the legal "dig,"
Whose jokes surpass e'en Georgie Graves in gay gag—
His frolic Lordship, Justice Bluebook Agag:

Entered and sat. . . . Now help me, Lord Apollo,
While sinks yon shaven chin on ermine tippet,
While chants the clerk that oath the twelve must follow,
And each reporter meditates his snippet,
To sing the flashing eye, the cheekbones' hollow,
The jaw, thin-lipped, keen-pouncing as a whippet,
The Roman nostrils and the Belfast brogue
Of plaintiff's counsel, Donovan O'Rogue.

A proper man despite his wig and gown!
And when at length he rose, lean fingers jingling
Full many a trouser-pocketed half-crown,
No female breast but felt a faint fond tingling;
And e'en the brazen heart of Monty Brown
Knew craven fear with apprehension mingling,
As, eye on bench (but t'other eye on jury),
O'Rogue K.C. told Sammy Mainz's story.

"Sir Samuel Moinz—me cloient, jintlemen—
Knoighted last year for princely jinerosity,
A naturaloized, a British citizen,
Moved boi no lust for gain, no animosity,
But driven disperate boi a gutter-pen
Unroivalled in its loibellous jocosity,
Asks you for simple English justice . . ." (Judge
Here entered in his notes: "O.'s opening—
Fudge.") . . .

"Me cloient gave a party last Juloy . . .
Me cloient's a most hoshpitable man;
And whin he entertains, like you or Oi,
He gives his friends the very best he can—
Good food, good woine, a bottle of the bhoy . . ."
(Here a hushed titter round the Court-room
ran) . . .
"In fact, if hoshpitality's a croime,
Sir Samuel shtands convicted ivery toime.

"This party, as ye'll hear in ividence
From well-known folk who actually were there,
Was—Oi'll submit to ye—in ivery sense
A most refoined and iligant affair . . .
Fwhat happens? . . . Tin days later, the defence
Publish an article in which they dare
To shtigmatoize this foine conviviality
As drunken and loicentious bestiality.

"Jintlemen, when Oi use those words, Oi mane
'em:
And when ye've read this rag, ye'll say Oi'm
roight.
Because he's friends and loikes to entertain 'em,
They shlander him, this honourable knoight.
And then . . . Do they withdraw? . . . No!
Cave canem.
They say: 'Our story's true. We mane to
foight.
We'll prove he treats his friends to grocer-whisky,
And bunny-hugs with females frail and frisky.

"'We'll prove these Saturnalia,' they say—
'These midnight orrgies of intoxication.'
Well, let them prove their tale in Court to-day;
Me cloient's here for cross-examination . . .
But, do they shtop at shlandering us? Not they!
They're not content with *proivate* defamation.
It isn't just 'the Stock-Exchange advoiser'
They ridicule—but, jintlemen, The Koiser!

"Mark that! A royal and friendly potentate
Exposed to insult by this 'Gossip Mail' . . ."

But here, lest smirch a patriot advocate
The realism of our bygone tale,
Muse lets Imagination perorate,
Secret Diplomacy once more prevail;
And—deftly sheathing her satiric truncheon—
Adjourns the awe-struck puppet-court for luncheon.

XXVII

Take up the tale in style press-orthodox.
MAINZ *versus* BROWN. SIR SAMUEL IN THE BOX.

XXVII

JUDGE'S REMARK. SIR D. O'ROGUE'S RETORT.
AUTHOR BREAKS DOWN IN CROSS-EXAMINATION.

On the resumption of the case, the court
Was crowded to the point of suffocation.
Outside, men pushed and struggled; women
fought.
The doors were closed to howls of execration.
Plaintiff (who's claiming damages for libel)
Then took the oath, and having kissed the
Bible,

Confirmed in full his counsel's opening story.
He owned, among his other country-places,
Mainz Castle, famed for its conservatory.
(Defendant: "And for clandestine embraces."
Sensation.) Plaintiff, turning to the jury:
"I gave this party for the Goodwood races."
His Lordship: "And of course they backed Black
Jester."
Sir Donovan: "Me lud beats Alfred Lester."

(*Some laughter.*) Judge: "Sir Donovan, withdraw
That doleful imputation on my wheezes."
(*More laughter.*) Judge: "I hope I know the law."
The plaintiff's counsel: "As your ludship pleases."
A voice: "Why don't you call him Bernard Shaw?" . . .
(The Muse: "How fortunate these legal breezes,
Wafting to weary slaves from us who buy 'em
Refreshers of a hundred pounds *per diem*.")

Continued. Order having been restored,
Plaintiff was asked: "You gave a dance, I think" . . .
"I did" . . . "And were your guests amused, or bored?" . . .
"Amused." The Judge: "You gave them lots to drink."
Plaintiff: "The usual quantity, my Lord."
(Defendant, *sotto voce:* "Strike me pink!").
Counsel, producing paper: "Does this article
Contain one grain of truth?" . . . "No. Not one particle."

Defendant (who's conducting his own case)
Now rose to cross-examine: "My suggestion
Is that the whole affair was a disgrace."
His Lordship: "You must put that as a question."
Defendant: "And I tell you to your face
The law's an ass. A fine point to be testy on
When . . ." Judge: "If you defend this case in person,
You are the ass." Defendant: "Billy Merson!"

(*Uproar.*) Defendant: "With the Judge's leave
I beg to tender a sincere apology"—
(His Lordship: "Granted.")—"and to say I grieve
That ignorance of legal phraseology . . ."
His Lordship: "That's a fault you might retrieve
By studying *Blake Odgers on Tautology.*"
Brown: "Right you are, me lud." To witness: "You
Maintain I've told a lie in print?" . . . "I do."

"And that this dance was absolutely proper?" . . .
"Yes." . . . "Did you drink champagne or
whisky?" . . . "Both."
"You danced?" . . . "Just once." . . . "And
came a fearful cropper?" . . .
Witness, in rising tones: "No, on my oath."
Defendant, to the jury: "That's a whopper.
Now, sir, believe me, I am more than loath
To put this question: Do you know Miss Lulu?"
His Lordship, puzzled: "Did he kiss a Zulu?"

(*Titters.*) Sir Samuel, answering the query,
Admitted that he did. "And was she
there?" . . .
"Where?" . . . "At the dance." . . . "She
was." . . . "And pretty cheery?" . . .
"She always is." . . . "She danced the
Grizzly Bear?" . . .
"She may have." . . . "Did you call her 'Lulu
dearie'?" . . .
"Never." . . . "At any rate, you paid her
fare?"
Witness, with heat: "Of course. It's her pro-
fession."
Brown: "Thanks, Sir Samuel, for that true ex-
pression.

" I've nothing more to ask." . . . Sir D. O'Rogue
Rising to re-examine : " Is this lady
A Maxixe dancer, very much in vogue ? " . . .
" She is." . . . " And is her foxtrot, Yip-i-yady,
Approved by Father Vaughan, by Cardinal Logue,
John Burns, Tod Sloan and Dickylegs Calmady ? " . . .
" It is." . . . " You paid, to give your guests this treat,
A largish sum." . . . " Too much. Here's her receipt."

Plaintiff, who'd been throughout most self-possessed,
Then left the box, his evidence concluded.
Counsel called Garforth Chumleigh, plaintiff's guest
(The well-known author of " What Very Few Did ").
Witness had seen no " brows Bacchante-tressed,"
No " warm white forms indecently denuded."
He thought Brown over-wrote. This " Saturnalia "
Seemed, to his judgment, an artistic failure.

Defendant : " Is that judgment based on pique ? " . . .
" By no means. You've a style that's most unpleasant,
No form, a split-infinitive technique,
The crude construction of a Celtic peasant." . . .
" Quite so. Now, at this dance of which you speak,
What other famous novelists were present ? " . .
" None." . . . " Then, admitting *you* slunk off to spend
Those blissful moments : *Who's your lady-friend ?* "

O'Rogue, K.C.: "Your lordship, I object.
The question is an outrage." . . . Mr. Brown:
"If you don't answer, what must we suspect?
I ask you: 'Who's this woman of the town?'" . . .
Chumleigh: "My lord, I beg you to protect"—
But here the witness utterly broke down,
And sobbing out, "That harridan grease-painted
Has blown the gaff", incontinently fainted.

* * * * *

All which, and more, Lord Reggie read and re-read—
(Including evidence by Jimmy Glover,
"Rag-time is Art"; the butler's view when *he* read
The article, and what he told the shuvver)—
And thought: "My grief, it makes one fairly see red—
All London knows that bounder was her lover—
Fainted!—the fool!—that absolutely tore it.
Reggie my boy, I wonder how you bore it—

"Though good old Jill, she never turned a hair—
When everyone in court was looking at her." . . .

But, far away, wing-screened from foot-lights' glare,
Waiting to follow T. E. Dunville's patter,
"Ha, Ha! Ha-ha! Let Mistress Jill beware,"
Hissed Hazeline. "Ten thousand devils drat her:
Come Hate, come Hope, come Scandal, Shame and Sorrow,
Wait till I'm in that witness box to-morrow."

XXVIII

Silence in Court! Here rants her stagiest scene,
Our sweetly-chaste, our childlike Hazeline.

XXVIII

Once more Judge Agag bids the tourney join.
Once more bright eyes gaze down the fray.
Now Brown the Quillman tilts at Knight of Coin
With marshalled facts in eloquent array;
While brief in hand, crushed silk at girded loin,
Horsehair on brow, proud Ulster sits to bay.
And twelve stout paladins of commonsense
Drink open-eared the speech for the defence.

Curt is that speech: as when John Bull's Horatio,
Steel helmet nodding, tips the wink to Douglas;
Or as when P. B.'s *sæva indignatio*
Reveals, dim-dark behind convention's smug glass,
The mysteries of some Albanian patio,
Where hidden-handed lurks a tiger-rug lass,
Inscribing on her tablets black as pitch
The names of all our wild and woolly rich.

"Fair comment," "Freedom of our English
Press,"
"No disrespect to plaintiff's nationality,"—
(O careful Brown! O poet-recklessness!—
O substance risked for shadows of reality!)—
"Gilded corruption," "Vice in evening-dress,"
"The common decencies," "Defied morality,"
"Sanctity of our homes," "This curse of rag-
time": . . .
Faster than fastest flappers flirt in flag-time,

Those phrases flit athwart his lordship's drowsing,
Trouble him restless in his high-backed stall.
"Dances debauched, caresses and carousing,
Out with them, root and branch, for good and
all!
Such, gentlemen, the cause of my espousing.
Such the bare facts; in proof whereof I call,
One who, thank God, is here to justify
My journal's boast: 'It never tells a lie.'"

He speaks no more; but Echo, trumpet-loud,
Repeats aloft that last shrill shibboleth;
Till falls a spell-bound hush upon the crowd;
Till even Fleet Street holds reporting breath,
As up those steps of fate—more palely proud
Than ever Martin Harvey stalked to death—
Robed in Jay's soberest of mourning frocks,
Mounts Haze Tredither to the witness-box.

Poor little, pure little, virgin-widow Miss!
Surely no motive save the best intent
Drags her white youth to such a case as this?
So frail, she looks; so girlish-innocent,
It seems her dear lips scarce know how to kiss
The pages of the Holy Testament.
Yet who shall say what poison-thoughts distil
Behind that look she darts at Reg. and Jill?

And now her voice, so childlike in its clarity,
Lisps forth its tale: Of how she was invited
By Saville's Duchess for a village charity;
And how, about the maypole fairy-lighted,
The simple rustics danced in chaste hilarity;
And how she played for them, and how recited;
And how the car broke down, and how Her Grace
Suggested shelter at Sir Samuel's place. . . .

Ah me, how different from the Morris-dances
Fiddled by honest gaffers on the green,
That nigger band, those drinks, those Maxixe-
prances.
Hardly the modest head of Hazeline
Dares to the Judge's seat its bashful glances,
As prompter's voice recalls that shocking scene.
"And after that," she falters to the jury,
"He asked us into his conservatory—

The famous one, that's underneath the lake" . . .
Sudden, the well-known whine: "O need I tell . . .
Surely it's all some terrible mistake . . .
And yet, and yet, *I saw them*. . . . Terribel . . .
Ah no, not that, not that! For pity's sake,
No names. . . . Poor Duchess. . . . Poor Sir Samuel." . . .
Sobs choke the whine . . . Raised fingers flutter dumbly . . .
"*Poor Lady Jill! Poor Mister Garforth Chumleigh!*"

Now by the Cat-faced One and Cow-horned Isis,
By Tum and Gorgeous Nut, by Set the Shabby
And Ra the slaughterer of cockatrices,
The Bag of Thoth hath loosed some scandal-tabby!
Now test, Anubis, on thy Scales of Crisis
This soul of Jill — if feather-brained and flabby,
Its nerves unbalanced tremble to disaster,
Or whether Pluck rise up Misfortune's Master.

Look! Doth it flinch before those judging eyes?
Doth quivering look betray, or finger's clutch,
The swift heart's pit-a-pat, the blood that dries
On lips accused of kissing overmuch?
Look well, and pass the soul. No carmine dyes
That face Suspicion puts to quizzing-touch.
Calm as Earl Curzon, cool as gherkins are,
My lady sits beside Lord Reggie Strar.

" Hypocrite," say you ? Who then, in our land,
From Loch Doon's bonny banks to those of Plender,
Shall be the first to raise the unoiled hand
And heave his half-brick at my sweet pretender ?
Which gallant hero of the Home Command,
Which Ramsay Stockholm-tarred, which Lansdowne-Ender,
Which Whitehall tester of the Madsen gun,
Shall not rejoice that law-clocks point to one ?

For hark, 'tis Agag's voice. With what discernment
For comic Muse's ragtime counterpoint,
His frolic lordship orders the adjournment.
Trip down, Tredither ! Jury-wights, aroint,
Blithe as Von Plessens, from your boxed internment !
Clerk of the Court, begone to veg. and joint !
Loud crows the " Cock " : " Ye rump-fed legal ronyons,
The witching hour has struck. To steak-and-onions ! "

Out of my sight, starved puppets. Off ye pop.
Public, K.C.s and juniors : away !
But thou, O'Rogue, we do enjoin thee : Stop :
List while Lord Reggie has his whispered say !
Hast heard ? 'Tis well. Now, when yon dolly-mop
Returns, full-gorged, tight-corsletted for fray,
Zounds, 'sdeath and 'sblood, she'll need a toughish stamina
To break the lance on which thou'lt cross-examine her.

XXIX

Its sure foundations riddled with perhapses,
The edifice of Brown's defence collapses.

XXIX

'Tis the great moment of the Ragtime Case.
Thick as, on Blackpool's strand, Lancastrian trippers
Flock pikelet-satiate to the concert-place,
Or dare the briny with their shrieking nippers ;
Tight-packed as, face to tail and tail to face,
Bristle in Watson's tins the silvery " Skippers " ;
Jostle the West End " fans " of tittle-tattle
To hear O'Rogue and Hazeline pitch battle.

Actress and advocate : as cute a pair
As ever matched their pretty wits in mummery :
She with her virginal, disingenuous air—
A dream of innocence in lace-edged flummery :
That other, smiling, courteous, over-fair—
Yet Doubt itself's embodiment and summary :
Their glances meet in measuring surmise,
As brogue suggests and lisp to brogue replies.

Polished and keen their edged words ring and slither,—
Parry that baffles, lunge that scrapes the mask.
How too polite that opening, "Miss Tredither,
Ye'll understand that moine's a thankless task." . . .
(How ready, how demure that answering blither,
"Mine too, Sir Donovan") . . . "but Oi must ask
If, as an actress, one who's all the rage,
Ye're paid as much as others on the stage? . . .

"'Ye are' . . . And 'rather more.' . . . That's foine. That's noice.
Then Oi'll assume ye wouldn't loi for money? . .
'Of course you wouldn't' . . . Shplendid." . . .
(Oh, that voice
Turning to wormwood answers sweet as honey) . . .
"Shtill, Oi expect, loike most folk, ye've your proice? . . .
'Ye haven't; and ye think me question's funny.' . .
Well, well. . . Now tell us whoi ye came to court? . . .
'To shpake the truth.' . . . Exactly what Oi thought.

"Who asked ye, though, to give this evidence? . . .
'Monty?' Ye mane defendant, Mister Brown.
Is he a friend of yours? . . . 'Oh, in a sense.' . . .
What sense? 'Ye've met him once or twice in town.'
'Ye sympathoized with him in his defence.'
'Ye think this rag-time ought to be put down.'
Better and better! Oi can take it then,
That *ye're* the power behoind this gutter-pen? . . .

"'*What do Oi mane?*'" . . . One hungry
finger taps
The opened pages of the "Gossip Mail."
"The question's aisy. Oi'm not setting traps.
Oi want to know who first inshpoired this tale—
This loiing tale. Now was it you? . . . '*Perhaps.*' . . .
Perhaps the pair of ye will end in gaol.
It *was* you, Miss Tredither. Then admit it . . ."
(O fly well-flung! O foolish trout that bit it!)

"Ye did this thing. And whoi? . . . 'Ye
thought it roight?'
'Ye thought it was yer duty?' . . . Well Oi
never. . .
Oi put it to ye, this was done for shpoite? . . .
'It wasn't.' . . . But ye made it yer endeavour,
Boi ivery manes, to bring about this foight:
Ye daren't denoi that. . . . Now then: Were
ye ever
A friend of Mister Chumleigh's? Koindly tell us
The truth this toime. . . . 'Ye were.' . . . And
ye were jealous.

"*Jealous!* Because ye found him sitting-out
With someone else! Is that it? Am Oi
wrong? . . .
Answer me, plaze. . . .'Oi am.' . . . Ye needn't
shout
The jury heard."

* * * * *

But why, sweet Muse, prolong
This agony? Why overply the knout?
Already victim quivers to the thong:
Already have our knowing readers spotted
How Reggie foiled the plot Tredither plotted.

Shall we then whelm that head Vedrenne-adored,
That neck begemmed by Cockie's hugest salary,
With maledictions of the vulgar horde,
Boos from the pit and cat-calls from the gallery?
Make spurt in eyes that Collins can't afford
The boiling tears of satire's meanest calorie?
Tweezer from virgin lips above suspicion
Tooth after tooth of painfullest admission?

Stage the whole scene?—the victim, writhing, whining,
Lashed with cross-questions, racked to recantation:
Brown on abortive feet: O'Rogue maligning:
The jury stolid in disapprobation:
Judge Agag, puns with precedents combining:
Sir Samuel's oleaginous elation:
My Lord of Strar's unfathomable attitude:
Jill, nonchalant—but prey to secret gratitude?

Sweet Muse, *je pense que non.* Though steel thy hands,
Brazen thy voice and tungsten-hard thy clear eye;
Though thou abhorrest those be-Binyoned Strands
Where nod Tradition's flapperesque Homeri;
Bow thee this once to Sentiment's demands,
Grant but three stanzas of *suppressio veri*;
And I will pay to thee for this thy loyalty
A golden guerdon from my Café-Royalty.

Presto! Behold the Goddess Compromise
In floods of whitewash hovering to settle.
Thee, Monty Brown, she bids apologize
('Tis time and time to grasp that costly nettle);
Thee, Mainz, ordains forego the damage-prize
Thy pot had fain extracted from his kettle.
Contend no more: since Darling diagnoses
Society's pet scandals as neuroses.

Then up, defendant, and withdraw thy pleas:
Get thee from Dunn's most conscientious hattery
Their softest remnant Homburg-Tyrolese,
To cap Sir Samuel's head with full-size flattery.
Then down, O'Rogue, and beg on bended knees
Thy pardon from the queen of Stageland's cattery;
Quo facto, in mellifluous doxology,
Accept that unconditional apology.

The case is closed. Endorse the brief, me lud;
Exempt the jurors and dismiss the parties.
"Here lie two mutts whose names are writ in mud."
Fiat justitia, my legal hearties!
Though Monte fall; though Solly sell his stud;
And Duggie's altar perish like Astarte's;
Though poker pass, and bridge, and "little horses"—
So fools pay fees, the law shall take its courses.

XXX

The Muse—to prosiest English condescending—
Sums up her tale and presages its ending.

XXX

Almighty public, ye whose pence we prize,
Above all praise of petulant reviewers
Who damn Gene Stratton Porter's starry eyes
And serve up Hall Caine's heart on paper skewers:
Friends finis-faithful tale's demise:
Renewers of our cash, and re-renewers:
Though Hobbs, Nobbs, Stokes and Sidney Colvin sneer,
The time has come to make our moral clear.

Imprimis then, (forgive one classic tag
With which we woo the heart of Girton's top Sis.,
And flaunt a revolutionary rag
At College Windows dark with ampelopsis:)
Lest patience fail as memory's tight-rope sag,
Deign to peruse our epic in synopsis;
Nor deem presumptuous that "One of Them" airs
The serial graces of a Ruby M. Ayres.

Our heroine, a girl you're sure to like,
(Unless, demanding much reduced verbosity,
Readers—like all good patriots—are on strike,)
LADY JILL LEWIS-SEYMOUR, whose velocity
Still stirs some dust on fashion's gilded pike,
Has now been steered from amorous precocity
Up to that point when publisher's requirement
Suggests she's earned her vellum-bound retirement.

We've sung her lineage, her first affair
(Her last—some unborn genius shall sing),
Her budding-time, her love for ALASTAIR—
A rosy rapture *sans* engagement-ring;
Broken her heart, and put it in repair—
Whereto, all said and sung, the coin's the thing;
And told—as Morning Post its morning menace—
The truth about that episode in Venice.

All which, a period of strenuous delving
Among the craggy tomes of those best-sellers
Whose first editions grace our study-shelving,
Plus some small knowledge of old storytellers,
Proved vital—as, to satire's axe, its helving;
Collars to Churchills; whips to Tony Wellers;
Spurs to the Staff, and vacuums to canners;—
For this our comedy of Mayfair Manners.

Thereafter, lest our story lacked for plot,
We introduced the reader, seriatim,
To Garforth Chumleigh, from whose inky pot
Both Joan and Peter plagiarize verbatim;
To Haze Tredither, pure as babe in cot
Till—Garforth loving Jill—she learned to hate him;
And Samuel Mainz, the staunchest British Teuton
Who ever separated Cave from Newton.

At Mainz's London house, Lord Reggie Strar,
Jill's oldest friend—a rich misogynist
Well-known at Horridge's Divorce Court Bar—
Warns Jill of Monty Brown, that journalist
Who blasts our reputations with a par.
But Jill, who's flighty, won't give up her tryst
With Garforth Chumleigh. Haze Tredither's dander
Involves all parties in a case for slander.

That Ragtime Case—its titters, its applauses,
Its ending compromised and circumspect,
Pleadings, sensations, posters, luncheon-pauses—
Muse trusts her faithful ones to recollect;
And passes, mindful of the kissing-causes,
To brief philosophy on their effect;
Since nowadays no scribe, however modest,
But closes on his *demonstrandum quod est*:

And this Great War—(as clearly understood
By those great souls who fight with breath and ink. . . .
One didn't notice it in Railway Wood,
But how should soldiers find the time to *think* ?)—
Has done us all a powerful lot of good;
Raised our morality; put down the drink;
And turned our thoughts to God instead of pelf—
Honest! my grocer told me so himself.

Wherefrom it follows as a consequence:
That if poor Muse desires to hold her head up
At that last literary Audience,
When George Moore raises the poetic dead up
And Herbert Jenkins stamps with Peter's pence
Those chits on which reviewers get so fed-up,
Her last four cantos must compose a quorum
Of Ethics, Truth, Religion and Decorum;

Morality must veil her brazen cheek,
And Conscience drape with Nonconformist skirts
Those wanton limbs that never knew the breek;
Smart bosom itch in horsehair tunic-shirts;
Till dogma'd cant and reason's pure critique
Have given all her puppets their deserts,
Till Evil cease and Virtue, vindicated,
Follow the track tradition-indicated.

So read all ye who doubt that Right prevails,
Who reckless tread the Chutney Terrace path
Where each man's latchkey fits his neighbours'
Yales
And Läis smokes de Reszkes in her bath,
How Care still perches on blood-horses' tails,
How Scandal yet exacts her aftermath,
How Albion's moral code is Albion's still
Nor swerves one jot for any Jack or Jill.

XXXI

By powder, bath, maid, unguents, brush, and comb—
To dress for dinner, there's no place like home.

XXXI

It chanced upon a night in *mi-carême*—
A peace-time night when all the arcs were shining
On the wet streets of London-*sur-le*-Thame—
About that time when Bromley thinks of "dining,"
And Brixton "sups" on Blackwell's "potted-game,"
And Chelsea dons the "kim." of Bakst's designing,
In Jill's high robing-room at Berkeley Square
Miss Parker waited for her bathing fair.

A chamber fit for Dian: maiden-white;
With cunning *tiroirs* wrought for camisoles;
And mirrors set to catch each needed light;
And dust-proof cupboards where the furry stoles—
Sables and silver-foxes ermine-dight,
Skunks and chinchillas—hung; nor feared the holes
Of summer's moth, nor knew the Polish tinter
Who bids us send him ours before the winter.

Tall-boys, there were: and hangers, tipped with
pearl,
Sliding on cedarn grooves to deep recesses
Which hid, faint-perfumed, swirl on folded swirl,
A silken treasury of evening-dresses;
Table and brushing-stool, and tongs to curl
The wanton gold of hat-disordered tresses;
And tortoise knick-knacks stiff with ruby mountings,
And jars of Coty scent beyond all countings.

Full strange it seemed to see, in such a room,
Britannia's trident and the silver casque
White-circletted of nodding ostrich-plume:
And well indeed might Mistress Parker ask—
Like some Cassandra boding blight and gloom
On all who frisked it at the coming masque—
Why people couldn't go to "proper balls"
Instead of "kicking-up at Albert Halls."

So Parker gloomed: till rose, all sweet-
dishevelled,
From waters creamed with many a fragrant
simple
Where overlong her Naiad form had revelled,
My Lady Jill; and doffed her bathing-wimple;
And at the vaporous mirrors crystal-bevelled,
Towelled smooth limbs, and powdered
shoulder-dimple,
And drew o'er glimmering bosoms white as milk
A russet-golden gown of wadded silk. . . .

Then laid the wench her lesser tasks away ;
And set the brushing-stool in place ; and bent,
Deft as *Saint Georges* himself on waving-day,
Above those tresses ripple-redolent.
Right many a word Miss Parker found to say,
As down and up the steady bristles went,
As sped the careful comb, as tongs were tried. . . .
But scarce a word her Ladyship replied.

For this was dreaming-time ; this simple bower
Jill's refuge from the complex calls of 'charity',
From all those duties, filling every hour,
Which leave small leisuring for mental clarity
To such as Lallie Charles or Langfier dower
With their great gifts of photo-popularity—
Among whose dizzy ranks, the Ragtime Case
Had won my heroine her pride of place.

Scarce less adored than Albion's Hazeline,
Throned and twice-throned on Mrs. Gossip's pars.,
Patroness of all Arts, unrivalled Queen
Of Beecham boxes, Empress of Bazaars,
She ruled it now at many a flashlight scene,—
Stella stellarum, Star among the stars :
A pure and radiant vision, Bond-Street-lent
To brighten London's smoky firmament.

And yet, Jill dreamed! And thus her dreaming ran:

"Strar Castle, Strarshire! Not a bad address
For Countess—Bluebeard. Who'll play Sister Ann?

'Here comes your husband—on the Scotch Express.
Fee-fi-fo-fum, he'll catch you if he can.' . . .

Jill, you're a little hypocrite. Confess,
You don't care *that* for Reggie's murky past,
Or who his first loves were—if you're the *last*.

"That's hardly likely either. . . . Lord, who cares? . . .

Et toi, Madame? And what about *your* closet?
There Chumleigh's scalp—and Giulio's—Alastair's.

And there's *my* first. . . . I wonder now, whose *was* it?
Oh yes, poor Bobbie's. . . . 'Lady Jill's affairs'—

A little box in Cupid's safe-deposit. . . .
Will he? . . . Or won't he? . . . If he does, I shall. . . .
Twenty wants lovers: twenty-eight—a pal."

But now both hair and dreaming-time were done.
Now Parker brought—*pour épater* the Grundies
Whom conscience racks with thoughts of plays that run

Month after month of censor-scorning Sundays—
Corset, cache-corset, stockings silken-spun

To match the shoes, and those lace-broidered undies
Which drive more husbands to the money-lenders
Than ever they made Kings pick up—suspenders.

All these the maiden donned. Then Parker passed
O'er head and arms Britannia's sea-blue trappings;
Drew girdle tight; made crimson tunic fast;
Pressed home each studlet of the shoulder-strappings.
Then, over all, an ermine cloak she cast,
Smoothing its folds; and took from tissue-wrappings
Gloves of white kid; and from the jewel-cases
Pearls, and great emeralds, and chrysoprases.

Then rose Britannia; while Parker stood,
Helmet on arm, the trident in her hand:
(Steel was the trident, but the helmet—wood.
Who reads the poet's rune, shall understand.)
And saw herself; and saw that she looked good;
And knew how wise she'd been to countermand
Breastplate and shield which, though they looked entrancing,
Would both have been a bore for tango-dancing.

And out she passed; and Parker held the door for her;
And down she passed, Britannia and none other,—
Wondering what the future held in store for her;
If Reggie merely liked her as a brother,
Or whether love indeed was what he bore for her.
And found her father waiting, and her mother;
And murmured, kissing both parental cheeks,
"I'll dine at home. We haven't met for weeks."

XXXII

God and our Cash! Britannia rules the waves!
Convention's yoke was only meant for slaves.

XXXII

Know'st thou the Taj-Mahal of Cockney-Town,
The glorious temple our Victorians builded
When good Lord Alfred barded for the Crown
And Gladstone blessed the deeds that Granfer
Will did?
Know'st thou that fane whose orioles look down
On storied spires, be-beasted and be-gilded;
That huge, harmonious, Kensingtonious dome
Whose "frozen music" calls the English home?

Chappell eternal! Butt of all the ages!
How wondrous shine its rooves when Phœbus
flings—
Red-gold as Rogan in his baton-rages—
A noose of light to catch their turretings!
How beauteously the fog of eve umbrages
Tree-bole and rails and face of her who sings!
Yet e'en more wondrous 'twas upon that night
When Jill and Reggie led the revel's height.

Themseemed they danced in some Mongolian
dvor,
Hewn from the Lenin-rock by supermenski
In days long pastovitch—when crowed *Coq d'or*,
And Georgeoff crowned King Judasstein Kerensky.
Themseemed they trotskied on a palace floor,
'Neath czarry skies, all brussiloff-goldenski :—
Or, possibly, in halls of fuchsine mists
Scrabbled by old vermilion Vorticists.

They only knew such beauty made them glad :
They only felt it very good to bound :
Britannia, she ; and he, Sir Galahad,
The saintliest lance of Arthur's Table Round,
In Morris Angel's whitest armour clad :
And many a Cup their thirsting lips had found,—
So that all sights of that enchanted grotto
Seemed like a dream, most roseately *blotteau*.

Though, e'en to sober eyes, it was a frolic
Beyond the reach of our subdued Terpsichore,
Whom " Dora " drives to drinks non-alcoholic
And curfew-cups of saccharine-and-chicory :
A peace-time pageant, gorgeously symbolic,
Where never clock ticked hickory nor dickory,
While Albion's nymphs, on twinkling feet and fawnlight,
Revelled with Albion's rulers till the dawn-light.

O Empire thrice and four times blessed by Fate,
Safe-buttressed on ten thousand O.B.E.'s!
O strenuous hands that launched our ship of state
Down greasy slipways to the Gallipolis!
How shall a dazzled poet designate
Those friskers at your bygone mysteries?
How, naming Capulets, could we refuse
Their meed of fame to Samuel-Montagus?

Nay, name no names, sweet pen! All, all, were there—
The whole gold scroll of Honours' party-list;
Knights of the Soap, the Hop, the Stock, the Share,
High priests by boodle's sacred Eucharist.
Gay beat the hearts in bosoms Vestal-bare;
Shrill rang the mirth from rouged mouths Clicquot-kissed;
Faster and ever faster, Greed with Henna
Footed it in the death-waltz of Vienna.

But little cared Britannia! Cloak and casque
Long since aside her gloveless hands had flung;
Useless accoutrement for tango-task,
Her blunted trident in the cloak-room hung.
And gay with Galahad she led the masque,
And round and round and round again they swung:
The maddest, merriest, blindest, wiftiest lovers
Four thousand years of History discovers.

Hardly they recognised amid the blither
Of flute, bassoon and drumsticks' rat-a-tat,
The whisking form of Hazeline Tredither
Draped as the Lily Maid of Astolat;
Hardly they knew that One who bostoned with her,
He of the flowing skirts and scarlet hat,
That Caporetto Vatican-divine
To whom Haze whispered, "Montmorency mine!"

Scarcely they saw that copy-hunting head,
High-boxed and brooding o'er the mazy scuffles—
Our Garforth Chumleigh, Shakspere-panoplied
In Clarkson bearding and Comelli ruffles:
Yea! scarce perceived that sea-dog, Devon-bred,
Breezy with Bollinger and flushed with truffles,
Sir Samuel Mainz—attired, for England's sake,
By Messrs. Nathan, as Sir Francis Drake.

Reg. and his Jill! (for intuition told her
That she *was* his, his latest loveliest trophy,
That soon her head would nestle at that shoulder
Where Pat had nestled erst, and Madge, and Sophie),
Mindful of beat but careless of beholder,
Slow through the strophe, swift in antistrophe,
Head touching head, and hand with hand extending,
They trod love's chorus till the last bar's ending.

* * * * *

And now they were alone. No curious eye
Might penetrate to their enchanted shrine,
Save his who came, fore-tipped and slinking-sly,
Wooden of face, plush-breeched, incarnadine,
Bearing sweet bivalves opened but to die,
Grapes and bloomed nectarines and aureate wine;
Came and departed, swift as Ganymede
When Jove approves the *tête-à-tête* decreed.

Alone! And suddenly it was as though
The years, the empty years, had never been;
As if, one flashing instant, hearts might know
The thrill of twenty-one for seventeen,
That first fine foolishness of long ago
When life seemed good to them, and clean, and keen . . .
And then it was as though they understood
How dull the world would be if *all* were good.

And "Jill," he laughs, "you're rising twenty-eight:
Or is it nine? Time's toddling on, old thing.
Now why not settle down, an' take a mate?
Strar Castle's vacant, if you're marrying." . . .
And "Reg.," smiles Jill, "you'll ruin the estate,
It can't afford a fourth engagement-ring."
And "Rot!" says Reggie. "Will you be my wife?"
And "Yes," she blushes, "*if the job's for life.*"

XXXIII

Hail and farewell, fourth, flightiest, loveliest far
Among the brides of young Lord Reggie Strar.

XXXIII

" *Hélas ! Hélas ! Hélas !* Sweet, subtle mistress !
Eight little months—and now we bid farewell.
Eight months to hold you close, kiss lips and kisstress ;
To love you (*vide* Swinnerton) " like Hell " ;
To calculate that rhyme for you, or this stress ;
To know you fair—and wonder how you'd sell ;
Eight months to hear in tram, train, tube or bus,
" It isn't half as good as ' One of Us.' "

Oh ! surely this is hardest of all bread
Won from the stubborn word by stanza-tillers :
Hard as that loaf, unrationed, bounty-fed,
Baked from burnt Bradburys by money-Spillers
Who crown with ninepences each votive head,
And bless—with millions forty-three—the millers :
Hard as the lot of those great Hats who labour
Where each man writeth chits unto his neighbour.

And yet, and yet, the dourest task of all,
Lost mistress Jill, is that which now my pen tackles.
For somehow you have made it so your thrall,
Twined round its feathered shaft such cunning tentacles,
That scarcely can I bear to let it fall—
Poor goosey wand with crossing nib and spent hackles,
Worn in your service; scarce indite a rhyme
To launch you, married, down the streams of time.

Aye, married—and to Reggie. His to kiss;
His by the registrar's accursèd benisons.
O Patmore, priest of matrimonial bliss:
O Locksley Halls: O horsehair-sofa Tennysons:
Help me to bear this cross. O Artemis,
Malthusian One who never yet bore any sons,
Restrain imagination, lest I skid
Adown the primrose path of *tertium quid*.

Veil from these eyes their last too vivid canto:—
Those Ritzian chambers on the Place Vendôme;
That Parker stooping o'er the oped portmanteau,
Among the nighties frail as Clicquot-foam;
And Reggie's valet, occupied *pro tanto*
With Hodgkinson-pyjamas, polychrome,
Pinker than petals of the garden-clove,
With just a dash of Hymeneal mauve:

Screen me, ah, screen in Cytherean gloom,
From my sub-conscious Freudian profanity,
That rose-embowered private sitting-room,
Where all is light and Ripolin and vanity;
Those egg-shell coffee-cups; yon peach's bloom;
My lady's blushes and my lord's inanity;
Screen them, I say—true love's apotheosis
Is not for one who suffers from neurosis!

Deaden these ears too keen, nor let them eaves-
drop:—
Mute me yon ticking face of *Or Molu;*
Let me not hear Grand Marnier's last reprieves
drop
Gurgling from yonder flask of orange hue,
As one by one the wilted roses' leaves drop,
White on the Persian carpet's turquoise-blue;
Nor snap of door, nor passing feet of waiter,
Nor bridegroom's "Well, old thing, I'll see you
later."

Bromide this too imaginative brain,
Which pictures, clear as scenery by Harker,
That sanctum of cool scents and porcelain;
Those final offices of Clara Parker;
The gold head nestling 'twixt its pillows twain;
Yon fatal switches clicking bedroom darker,
Till but two pinkly-shaded gleams abide
Where Maple swansdown mattresses the bride.

Still me this pulse: 'tis not for me they wait,
The rounded arms, the linen bridal-pillows;
I shall not waken when the dawn grows late
In Coty'd fragrance of those tumbled billows,
Nor woo with morning's kiss my drowsy mate
To dream-remembrance of sweet peccadilloes;
I shall not feel those soft limbs thrill to mine,
As lip locks lip, and hands with hands entwine. . . .

Ah, cruel, cruel mistress! Not for me—
Who made you perfect, made you but to lose you—
Desire's full-throated sanctioned ecstasy,
The matrimonial warmths that now suffuse you.
I may but hold you close in memory,
But let these eyes peruse and re-peruse you,
But lavish their meticulous affections
On erring typists and cold proof-corrections.

Who cares? Not we! The game's played out between us—
Good luck or bad. *Nitchevo*, Lady Jill.
We loved: we part. Let never tears demean us.
Laughing we sinned; and laughing, foot the bill.
You change the pose of Artemis for Venus;
While I—I merely take another quill
Since Muse has better fish than you to fry
In her postscriptum: Lady Strar, good-bye.

EPILOGUE

Peace, perfect Peace! Who wouldn't do his duty
For English letters, Aliens and Beauty?

EPILOGUE

What bodes this throng? Why cheer these
Cockney voices?
Peal out, wild bells! Blow, organ-bellows, blow!
Why neigh the Creams? Why thutter the Rolls-
Royces?
Nod your tall heads, ye lily-buds arow!
What glads our Town till even Inge rejoices?
Don, choir-kids, don the surplice white as snow!
Why ride the Tins in full review-array?
'Tis Hazeline Tredither's wedding-day!

Who wives the queen? *Snap, Kodak-shutters,*
snap!
Which charming Prince, which luckiest of
Lords,
Has won this pearl to grace his Garter-strap,
Leads to his bed the virgin of our boards?
Wave, kerchiefs, wave! Tap, kettle-drumsticks,
tap!
Eyes front, the Tins! Draw swords and carry
swords!
He comes. He comes. The proudest cove in
Town:
Tredither's consort, Montmorency Brown!

But surely they . . . *Avaunt, thou lying tongue!*
That case, I mean . . . *Case me no cases here!*
When she . . . *Wouldst smirch, with mud by hirelings flung,*
That little head the suburbs hold so dear?
Her second spouse . . . ? *Forfend it, Brigham Young:*
A rumour started by some pamphleteer.
False witnesses. . . . *Ho, constables! a stave*
To crack the sconce of this malicious knave.

To church! To church! The Thespian bridesmaids wait.
Flaunt your green banners, azure Suffragettes!
Look up, pure eyes to Hymen consecrate!
Stand forth, incumbent of St. Margaret's!
Scandal? Who cares for scandal out of date?
God's in his heaven, and the Press forgets.
Breathe, Eden-voice, that lifts the curse of Adam
From every Eve who swops her "Miss" for "Madam."

O day of days, which in one flat unites
Our Gossip-Mailer and his footlight-queen!
O Brown, Brown, Brown, most fortunate of wights:
O happy, happy, happy Hazeline!
O Albion, paradise of parasites:
O wondrous whitewash making all men clean!
Who gives away this maid so chastely comely?
'Tis Bedford Street's anointed, Garforth Chumleigh!

Peer, eyeballs, peer! 'Tis Garforth's very self,
Sex's high priest, our modern Machiavelli
Who purged the cluttered late-Victorian shelf
Of Braddon, Humphry Ward and Miss Corelli.
Sneer, Grub Street, sneer. The pot a-boil for pelf
Disdains the carking of your hungry belly.
Kneel, readers, kneel: and learn how your relations
Died for the League of his Hallucinations!

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Who stands him sponsor to the Consort-King?
See, see, my Lord of Squiff in yonder pew!
Who hands our noble groom his wedding-ring?
Cobden for blindfold Britain, Cadbury-true!
Whose palm shall fee the priest at vestrying?
Angels of Empire, guard this German Jew!
Hoch! Hoch! Und dreimal Hoch! Und noch-
mal eins!
'Tis Privy Councillor Sir Samuel Mainz.

Rejoice! Rejoice! The nuptial knot is tied.
Sign, sign the book. Blow, bellows. Boys,
intone.
While Hamburg's free, while bridegroom seeks his
bride,
Shall Merrie England lack for Mendel's sohn?
Turn, Pathé, turn! Press close, O crowd out-
side.
Rain, rain, most fertile seedlets Patna-grown . . .
They're in. They're off. Shoes for the limousine
Which bears from sight our peerless Hazeline!

But wait! But wait! Not yet the pageant closes.
The guests, the guests! All Mayfair-clad they come:
Belgravia's teeth and Stageland's powdered noses:
Fleet Street patricians and Whitehall scum:
Her Grace of Quoi, with friend, in Tatler-poses:
Miss Pense-que-non (who makes "No! Auntie" hum):
To coach, to car! while raucous nippers cry,
"Brahn's Gossiper! It never tells a lie!"

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Disperse the crowd. Show's done. No motors more.
Files right, the Tins. *Walk march.* And if one say:
"Why turned ye out, most honourable corps,
To prank a scandal-monger's wedding-day?"
Answer them, ghosts: "*Thus England did, and more,*
To us who served for honour's beggar-pay,
To us the unanswered salvoes rent and mangled
While politicians lied and lawyers wrangled.

"*Thus England did—and does. We rot unshriven.*
The shrapnel whistles, and the gas-fumes reek,
Over our tombs—wood crosses, bullet-riven.
The foul slime chokes our mouths that may not speak.
But these our murderers: they sit forgiven,
At ease among your councils, tongue-in-cheek.
These who, when Roberts warned, made party-game of it—
On you and them, God's curse be, and the shame of it."

THE END

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